

DETERMINATION EARNS A TRIP 'DOWN UNDER'

BY CHRISTINA ROYSTER-HEMBY

There are two places that 15-year-old NSBE Pre-Collegiate Initiative member Cameron has always wanted to go: New Zealand and Australia. So last January, when the New Mexico teenager found out his teacher would be putting on a trip there that following June, he thought he would have his chance. All he had to do was ask his mom for the money.

But for Cameron's mom, Lavita Daniel, a single mother who works as a pupil advocacy liaison for the Rio Rancho Public Schools, raising an unexpected \$2,900 plus money for incidentals for a trip only a few months away would not be easy. So Cameron started reaching out to his family members and to local businesses in the Rio Rancho area. But he was not able to raise the money. His hopes were dashed.

"My mom said, 'Cameron, it's going to be all right. You'll just have to [see the other kids off], wave good-bye and tell them to have a good time.'" He told her, "No, I'm not doing that. I'm going," though he didn't know how.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Little did he know he'd meet his gift horse that March at the 32nd NSBE Annual National Convention.

Cameron traveled from New Mexico to Pittsburgh, Pa., for the weeklong event, along with 20 members of his NSBE Jr. chapter, Saturday Science and Math Academy, which is based at the University of New Mexico. The Academy team entered the four-wheeled robot they had designed from LEGOs for the "Moon Mining Madness" workshop, part of the convention's Pre-College Initiative (PCI) Conference. They had been working on the model since January.

"We lost," Cameron relates. "But it wasn't the robot that got me the attention."

When he had arrived for the convention on March 27, Cameron had met NSBE

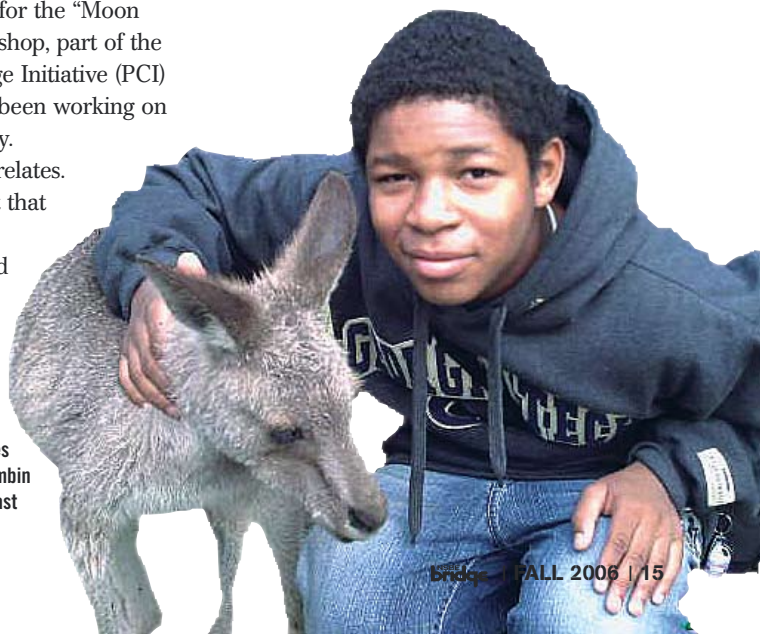
member Lee Pham, 2004–05 national treasurer, while they were at Pittsburgh International Airport waiting for a shuttle to their hotels.

"He was impressed with me, because I told him, 'When I grow up, I want to be a civil engineer,'" Cameron recalls. "And I'm going to go to Stanford, and I want to design my own hotels."

"Oh, and I want to own a chain of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

NSBE's Cameron Weaver poses with a kangaroo at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary in Gold Coast Australia.





(Above) NSBE's Cameron Weaver (right) with his mentor, Erby Foster of The Clorox Company. In photo at right, Cameron visits a dairy farm in Argodome, New Zealand.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

them,'” Cameron concluded.

Pham was so impressed with Cameron that he pulled him out of a workshop for kids interested in becoming civil engineers to introduce him to a few executives of The Clorox Company, cosponsors of the workshop. Cameron met Erby Foster, director of Diversity and Inclusion, Angela Jones, director of Distribution Center Operations, Tim Bailey, vice president of Product Supply, Wayne Delker, Ph.D., vice president of Research and Development and Robin Evitts, vice president and chief information officer for the Oakland, Calif.-based company.

DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

After the introductions, Cameron decided to go one step further.

“I asked [Mr. Foster], how much Clorox makes in a year,” Cameron says. “He said, ‘Four billion dollars.’ Then I said, ‘Well, I need \$2,900 of that amount to go to New Zealand and Australia.’”

“They laughed at me at the time. And when they laughed, I thought, ‘Cameron, you’re not going.’ But Foster gave Cameron his card and asked the youth to

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give him a call.

“I called him that Monday and all of that week. I probably called him about 100 times,”



Cameron says. “Finally, he called me back the week after that,” he recalls.

Foster put Cameron in touch with Angela Jones, who called Cameron’s mother at work on April 14.

“When she said, ‘Ms. Daniel, we would like to sponsor your son for this educational tour,’ I couldn’t believe it,” Daniel says, still giddy at the memory. “I don’t have the words to express how that made me feel, [except] my son made me believe in the impossible.”

'BLESSED AND GRATEFUL'

Foster points out a conversation he had with Cameron to illustrate further just how special this young man is.

“Cameron asked me, ‘Mr. Foster, is there anything that I can do for you or Clorox? Do you have any shirts with the Clorox name? I’d love to wear them on my trip and advertise for your company.’”

“After I got up off the floor,” Foster says, “I asked Cameron to send me a summary of the robotics competition and keep a journal of his trip to Australia and New Zealand. And I told him we would send him a few Clorox shirts.”

“We all feel blessed and grateful for the opportunity to make a small difference

in a young man’s life...and everyone at Clorox now calls Cameron my ‘NSBE son,’” Foster adds.

LEARNING TO ASK

Cameron says he enjoyed the trip overseas. In addition to the sightseeing, it gave him some lifelong lessons.

“I learned how to be very independent, to manage my money, how to make my own acquaintances,” he says. “I learned that the value of traveling [goes beyond the actual trip],” he adds.

But going “down under” — a nickname for New Zealand and Australia that means “below the equator” — was not the only educational tour Cameron was able to take this summer as a result of his persistence. He just came back from the Clorox world headquarters in Oakland, where he was able to hobnob with executives this past July.

“Being with Clorox the last few days has been one of the best experiences of my life, because I have gotten a chance to meet so many black businessmen in the corporate arena,” Cameron says. “I wanted them to put me to work.”

And they did. Foster says Cameron gave a 30-minute PowerPoint presentation to a room of 20 employees, including top Clorox executives.

“Lots of kids are afraid to ask for what they want, because they’re used to [adults] telling them no,” Cameron says. “But this has taught me that if you know that someone or some company has the resources to help you achieve your goals, you should not be afraid to ask them,” he adds.

“Next year, I’m not going to be afraid to ask. I want to go to Europe,” Cameron says with pride. “I haven’t mentioned that to [Clorox] yet.

“But if I go, I want someone from Clorox to come with me.” ■

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