Momentum Center
Civil Rights Road Trip brings history alive

By JARED LEATZOW Grand Haven Tribune
Jun 3, 2023

The Civil Rights Road Trip crew pose for a photo outside.

Courtesy photo / Barbara Lee VanHorssen

For four days in April, several Tri-Cities residents traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, as well as Memphis, Tennessee, in the southern United States.
“We basically went to four towns,” said Cindy Krause, one of those who participated in the trip. “We started in Birmingham and went to the Civil Rights Museum in Birmingham, then we drove to Selma and walked the Selma Bridge, we then went to Montgomery and went through their Legacy Museum and memorial. Then we went to Memphis to the Lorraine Hotel and Civil Rights Museum.”

This marks the third time the Civil Rights Road Trip has been offered by The Momentum Center. Executive director Barbara Lee Van Horssen said the second trip was cancelled due to a number of registrants becoming ill.

“We focused on Civil Rights and the Black experience in the United States,” Krause said. “Each museum had its focus and each museum was very overwhelming for us. The Legacy Museum really brought the picture together.

“It brought the history of the Black oppression in the United States, where the Civil Rights Museum brought the Black struggle to be recognized and to get out of the grave we had created for them prior to that,” she continued.

Leif Van Horssen said most of the people that attended the trip this year were alive during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. However, there were some teenagers that attended as well.

One of those attending was Grand Haven High School sophomore Leilany Teasley, who took time off from school to attend. She said she is a member of the school group Calling All Colors, which fights for racial equality in Grand Haven schools.

“At the Legacy Museum the biggest takeaway I saw was how these systems are still intact with our prison system,” Teasley said.
Later she added, “I’ve always been interested in race relations, (and) civil rights. My family and myself have experienced first-hand racism, especially in a community with low diversity. I first learned about it (Civil Rights Road Trip) from Calling All Colors.”

According to the U.S. Census website, approximately 94 percent of people living in the Grand Haven area are white. Both Spring Lake and Ferrysburg have demographics.

Some of The Momentum Center's funding comes from Ottawa County. Barbara Lee VanHorsen said The Civil Rights Road Trip was not paid for using those funds; it was paid for by an underwriter and is a fundraiser for the organization.

“It is really about being uncomfortable and being immersed in the areas where these historical events took place,” Barbara Lee VanHorsen. “And too comeback with a richer, deeper understanding of our inner connectedness.”

Focused on mental health, Barbara Lee VanHorsen said The Momentum Center recognizes the social determinants of health – non-medical factors – like racism can play a role in this.

“People who have made a commitment to DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) aren’t often sure what to do next,” Barbara Lee VanHorsen said. “This is something you could send your employees to for real experiential learning. I think this has a better chance of actually moving the needle. Instead of just talking about something, and then just saying what your boss wants you to say at the end.”

Contact Jared Leatzow at jleatzow@grandhaven

tribune.com
Jared Leatzow