

Weekend event Aspires to build a can-do attitude

Teen summit, music, gospel explosion on tap at WKU

By NATALIE JORDAN, *The Daily News*

A two-day event that has brought more than 1,000 people to Madisonville is slated to bring the same, if not more, to the campus of Western Kentucky University beginning today.

The Bowling Green-based nonprofit Light of Chance will host Aspire, a weekend event aimed at building self-esteem, a culture of achievement and unity in communities. The event is sponsored by the WKU Journalism and Broadcasting Department and PNC Bank.

"It's about revitalization, rejuvenating people," said Eric Logan, founder and executive director of Light of Chance. "It's a weekend of fun and excitement.

"We want to show and tell the people in the community that they can be what they want to be and it's never too late to achieve their dream."

The weekend, which carries the theme "Wake Up," will consist of a teen summit, concert and gospel explosion.

"We want people to wake up to things going on in their communities and the world, to wake up to opportunities," he said. "The world is ours for the taking, but if we don't wake up, opportunities will pass us by."

The two-day event will kick off after registration today with Evansville, Ind.-based Boom Squad, a 75- to 100-piece drumline and dance team. And from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., about 200 12- to 18-year-olds are expected to converge in WKU's Mass Media and Technology Hall for interactive, youth-centered sessions and workshops, including artistic expression, exercises in improv theater, general health, Greek stepping and life skills.

"I'm definitely looking forward to this," said Shawn Whitsell, who has been involved in Aspire since it began, and will facilitate the improv theater workshop called Acting Up. "I love working with youth, and this is an opportunity to give back and teach what I've learned, and inspire people like those who inspired me.

"It's always an experience."

The keynote speaker will be Kirk Hawkins, a former track athlete and author of "Smooth Transition: A High School Guide to College Success."

The teen summit is free and open to youth, and on-site registration begins at 9 a.m. at MMTH. Breakfast and lunch will be provided for all participants, and door prizes and giveaways will be available to win throughout the day.

The Aspire Jam concert will feature various musical acts and artists, such as a Nashville's 92 Q radio personality Jene India and Bowling Green R&B singer Tevin. The concert, slated to begin at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, will be at Van Meter Auditorium on WKU's campus, and will be hosted by comedian Brian "B Cov" Covington, of Nashville.

The concert is free to summit participants, but there is a \$5 admission fee for the concert for others who would like to attend.

The weekend will culminate with a gospel explosion at 3 p.m. Sunday at State Street Baptist Church. It will feature performances by Eleventh Street Missionary Baptist Church's Unity Choir, Women of Grace, A Greater Praise Mine Ministry from Northern Kentucky University, and Unity of Campbellsville. Sunday's event will also feature a message by Pastor Robert L. Clemmons of Christ Church.

This is the first time the event has been hosted outside Madisonville. Logan said he hopes to have even more participants than in previous years since Bowling Green is larger than Madisonville.

"We're excited about it, but I'm nervous because I don't know how Bowling Green will respond," he said. "But I can guarantee if people come out, they will have a great time. It's nonstop from beginning to end."

Light of Chance is a nonprofit organization aimed at community development and revitalization through programs, workshops and community events.

Logan said the concept for both the weekend and the nonprofit stemmed from a conversation he had with a gentleman in his hometown of Madisonville. Logan said the gentleman said the community needed more people like him.

"That was on a Saturday, and while I was in church that Sunday, I thought about what he had said," Logan said. "There are more people like me in the community and I wanted to highlight these people. I wanted to reach out to the communities, especially the young adults."

Aspire was the organization's first event and has grown since its inception in 2007.

Logan said they've seen success with the weekend in Madisonville, growing to have participants from southern Indiana, Paducah, Louisville and Cincinnati.

He said it seemed like a natural thing to bring the event to Bowling Green - "helping those within the community that I live now," he said.

While the teen summit is age-specific, he said, the event is designed to have something for everybody. Both the concert and the explosion are communitywide events.

"This is something everyone can be a part of," he said.