



Students from Moten Elementary School participate in the National Building Museum's Geodesic Dome program during a Live It Learn It trip.

## “Live It Learn” It Makes the City its Classroom

BY KENDRA LANGDON JUSKUS

The Lincoln Memorial. The Washington Monument. The National Gallery of Art.

These are just a few of the sites that define Washington, DC for most Americans. But for many District schoolchildren, the monuments, museums and historic sites are the stuff of legend and lore. They are places these children hear about and glimpse from the Metro, but never actually get to experience.

As a native Washingtonian and a teacher in the DC Public School system, Matthew Wheelock decided to expose his students to these rich educational resources. He began taking his classes on field trips to historical sites around the city and enhancing those trips with lessons that put them in the context of the school's curriculum.

The trips were so successful in enhancing his students' learning that Wheelock decided to devote himself full-time to developing an experiential learning program. In 2005, Live It Learn It was born. Wheelock began reaching out to under-resourced schools, partnering with fourth through sixth grade teachers to bring students out of the school and into the larger classroom of Washington, DC. Today it partners with 17 public schools, most of which are located east of the Anacostia River.

“In the classroom,” says Wheelock, now Live It Learn It's Executive Director, “kids who excel at reading and writing rise to the top. One of the most amazing things we see [with Live It Learn It] is that students who, in the classroom, are really reluctant to raise their hands or get involved, when you get them [on the trip], they're right up there, raising their

hands, saying ‘Boom! I can do this!’ That confidence level really kicks in.”

Live It Learn It's mission is two-fold: Reinforce what students are learning in the classroom, and motivate them to stay excited about the learning process. So far, it's doing a good job.

“It's been a wonderful experience,” says Rose Brown, who teaches special education at Ferebee-Hope Middle School in Ward 8, and has been partnering with Live It Learn It since its start. “The kids have been able to retain the information and then apply it to different situations. We went to the Holocaust Museum and they were able to absorb the concepts. They're starting to apply the things we learned about the Holocaust and what happened to the Jews to what we're learning now about African American history and the civil rights movement.”

### An Intense Learning Experience

The Holocaust Museum is just one Live It Learn It destination. The organization bases an interdisciplinary curriculum of science, art and history on the District's public education standards and the experiences available, which range from visits to the Frederick Douglass house to boat expeditions on the Anacostia—the kinds of adventures that kids love, and the kinds of learning experiences that stick with them.

The field trips are reinforced by the teaching of Wheelock and his two colleagues, Program Associate Erica Harper and Program Assistant Danielle

Massiah. Along with resources for the teacher and lesson booklets for students, the Live It Learn It team provides a pre-trip classroom lesson to familiarize students with vocabulary and concepts they will encounter on the trip. Shortly after the trip, the team returns to the classroom to help students digest the experience and review what they've learned. Together, the team and the students build relationships and substantive learning experiences.

The Live It Learn It staff is excited to expand its programming to more students, but refuses to sacrifice the quality of the experiential education it offers. High-quality supplemental education is essential in DC's current educational environment.

Says Wheelock, “DCPS is a struggling institution that's got lots of challenges and is not giving kids the opportunities we should be giving them to be successful in life. This is one effort to try to do that, and in DC we've got these fabulous resources that are right there and shockingly under-utilized by the local public schools.”

Through that effort, many of the capital's children are getting the chance to explore landmarks that they had previously only seen from afar. And they're enjoying them, too.

“Kids get really excited about the program,” says Erica Harper. “One of my favorite quotes [from students] is, ‘I learn and have fun at the same time!’ They've always thought the two couldn't go together.”

To learn more about Live It Learn It, visit [www.liveitlearnit.org](http://www.liveitlearnit.org) or call (202) 546-6223. ♦