

From the Inner City to the City of Trees

By Kathleen Tuck



CARRIE QUINNEY

Daejon Moore, Ryan Crutchfield, Deacon John Wilson and Charles Sims take a moment to relax during New Student Orientation.

ONE IS A DAREDEVIL WHO LIKES EXTREME SPORTS AND PLANS TO MAJOR IN PSYCHOLOGY. THE OTHER IS A SELF-DESCRIBED COMPUTER GEEK WHO PLAYED BASKETBALL AND FOOTBALL IN HIGH SCHOOL.

While they may seem to have little in common, both hail from the same West Los Angeles church congregation, and both are a little surprised to find themselves at Boise State, in a city they once would have had trouble finding on a map.

“I watch college football, so I had seen the team play,” said outdoor enthusiast and psychology major Daejon Moore. But he admits he didn’t know anything about the school until encouraged to take a closer look by an unlikely advocate, Deacon John

Wilson III of West Angeles Church of God in Christ.

Wilson was instrumental in getting both Moore and computer science major Ryan Crutchfield to consider Boise State as a viable college option. In fact, the two are among seven incoming freshmen and four returning students from the huge Protestant church known for its dynamic ministries and a membership that includes Stevie Wonder and Denzel Washington.

Wilson heads the church’s higher education ministry that encourages young members of the congregation to attend college. The program includes actual visits to campuses throughout the United States, tutoring and mentoring help for college entrance exams and admission packets, and outreach in the form of periodic visits to all the colleges and universities where the students are placed.

Wilson discovered Boise State while on a tour of western out-of-state schools and was blown away by the friendliness of the staff, the ongoing construction — which he saw as a sign of positive growth — and the school’s small-town feel and huge heart. “Boise State was

the outstanding school that I visited,” he says. “I didn’t believe what I saw.”

Unsure if African American kids from Los Angeles would feel the same, he decided to gather 10 of his “pickiest” students, including his own daughter, for a site visit. “Nine of them loved it,” he says.

Students appreciated the school’s laid-back feel and slower pace, its quality programs and the river running along the northern edge of campus. Parents were impressed with community safety and affordability.

“When parents hear ‘Boise,’ they have questions,” Wilson says. “Even if their kids are excited about it, they want to come and check it out.”

Because of that, Wilson often arranges for parents to come and see the campus, and he visits students every couple of months to provide support, answer questions and make sure they are fitting into campus life.

“The students love the feel on campus and notice the friendliness right away,” Wilson says. “Inner-city kids can feel if someone is just patronizing them. Here they feel a legitimate desire to offer the education they need in a fair way.

“Even when a student says they miss home, when they come home they can’t wait to get back to Boise State.”



JOHN KELLY

ON THE RISE

A record enrollment of 19,993 students marks a 5.6 percent increase over fall 2009 and is the state’s largest enrollment for higher education institutions. Boise State’s enrollment has grown 21 percent since 2000 and 48 percent since 1990.