



Bowie MD teen James Abendroth volunteering in Trinidad this Thanksgiving

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James Abendroth, 19, of Bowie, will be renovating a community center in St. Barbs, Trinidad.

While many of us will be sitting down with our loved ones on Thanksgiving, a young man by the name of James Abendroth is spending the holiday thousands of miles away from home.

“It’s definitely a first,” said the 19-year-old Bowie resident, who will instead be celebrating Thanksgiving in the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Abendroth will spend in Nov. 22 through Dec. 12 renovating a community center in St. Barbs.

As a member of the Generation Peace Academy, a 12-month service program tethered to the Unification Church, Abendroth is required to spend at least 21 days doing relief work or public service in a developing country.

Abendroth said he chose the project in Trinidad and Tobago because of the construction aspect it entailed.

“It was the one that involves a lot more heavy labor and heavy lifting,” Abendroth said. “There’s also a

bunch of relationship building with the community, and that's really the core of it all."

Abendroth will be working alongside other members of the Generation Peace Academy and the Rose Foundation. Local officials hope the renovations will help lower crime throughout the city, said Abendroth, who added that his 14-member group will be staying in a church center in the same fairly high crime area.

"We are definitely going to be down in the rough of it all," he said. "It's a little bit scary."

Pushing any fears aside, Abendroth said this Thanksgiving he will be most thankful to experience another part of the world.

"It's something that's going to give me so much more gratitude than what I have here at home," Abendroth said. "I think it's going to be the best Thanksgiving of my life."

Abendroth has been involved in serving others and the community practically his entire life and he said his parents, Robert and Diane of Bowie, are to thank for that.

"It's kind of just the way I've been raised," he said. "My parents are always giving; giving to us and always giving to people."

Abendroth is not only an Eagle Scout, the highest rank of Boy Scouts, but he is also an influential leader of the youth ministry of his church.

Abendroth has also put his own education on hold in order to help serve others for a year. Before he joined the Generation Peace Academy, he was a first year physical science major at the University of Maryland.

"It was definitely hard to pull away (from college)," Abendroth said. "But I thought, 'This one year here on GPA is going to mean a lot more to the people I'm meeting and mean a lot more to my family and friends than staying at home for another year of college.'"

His mother, Diane, said she is really happy James is part of the program.

"I feel like this is going to be something that will help him know himself better and will help him with motivation to study harder when he gets back," she said.

Diane Abendroth joined the Unification Church in the '70s and has since experienced harsh tests of her faith, including having been kidnapped in an attempt to be forced to "de-program."

"It didn't break my faith," she said. "I wouldn't have the life I have now if the deprogramming had taken hold."

Having prevailed, she went on to meet her husband through the church and would eventually have five sons: Edward, 23; Richard, 21; James, 19; Robert, 17; and John, 15.

She has raised her kids, she said, with the idea that service is of "paramount importance" to make the world a better place.

"And we know you sometimes have to sacrifice family time for that," she said.

Diane Abendroth added that her son has been very influenced by his Boy Scouts experience as well as his two older brothers — Edward, who participated in the precursor program to Generation Peace Academy, and Richard, who served a year in Iraq as an Army Reservist.

“I am really proud of him,” she said about James. “I feel like it’s going to be so good for him and really help him be serious about what he wants to do in the future. I think it will give him a clearer vision of what he has to give.”

That is exactly what James said he plans to take away from his experience in Trinidad and Tobago as well as his experience with the Generation Peace Academy.

“I want to take with me a more worldly view on the situation I’m in and be appreciative of what I have,” Abendroth said adding again that he is very thankful for his parents’ influence, but especially the influence he draws from his mother’s experiences.

“I just want to speak for her and speak for her accomplishment,” he said. “She has made me who I am today.”

“I’ve spent so many years focusing on my own life and insuring my own well-being,” he added. “Now it’s time to do my part to give back to the world.”