'America's Spirit' Spurs Program To Aid Ghetto Youth

By TIM ELLEDGE
District Reporter

BATH — A television soap opera star, the chief of the federal Job Corps program and the headmaster at Bath's Hyde School have teamed up to start what might be the beginning of a full-blown nationwide training program to lure big-city ghetto kids off the streets and into schools and jobs.

The unlikely combination has forged a plan that will begin the end of this month with a series of musical productions in several eastern states by Hyde's America's Spirit group.

It will lead, they hope, to formation of half a dozen more groups composed entirely of Job Corps students who will spread Hyde's teaching methods around the nation to other Corps centers like hundreds of young Johnny Appleseeds.

Actress Ruth Warrick, whose career has spanned four decades from her role in Orsen Wells's film "Citizen Kane" to Broadway plays and now the lead in the daytime series "All My Children," saw a production of America's Spirit when it played Broadway's Circle in the Square theater.

"That convinced me," she said. "It was like being at a football game, a soccer match and a bullfight all at the same time. It was the most exciting, the most inspiring thing I'd ever seen."

Since early in the Kennedy administration Warrick has served on several presidential, governmental, arts-related advisory groups trying to convince Washington that the arts — theater, music, film and dance — are more than costly frills; that without them the nation will get bogged down in a mechanistic, technological slump that robs its energy. After the deadly riots in Watts, she organized a drama workshop there under Operation Bootstrap and has since formed film and acting groups for the Job Corps.

"I'd been looking for a way to use the performing arts in the Job Corps," she said. "If there's any way to penetrate the tough cover these children have developed, it's going to be through the arts. And I knew there had to be something. If you could just touch them, inspire them, then something inside will take over from there. They'll finally take off and grow on their own."

After the Circle in the Square production by Hyde, she said, "I went back to the Department of Labor and said I've found the group that can do what I've been trying to sell you on all this time."

The idea was passed along to Hunter Smith, the Job Corps curriculum director, who talked to several others about it and then flew to Brunswick where America's Spirit was performing at Bowdoin College.

"It looked good," he said. "Now we're going to try it."

The Job Corps, he said, is almost like a boarding school. It's a 24-hour-a-day program that provides counseling, job training, education, even small allowances and clothing for unemployed, disadvantaged, school dropouts — mostly from big cities.

A long series of visits back and forth between Washington and Bath led to a $73,000 contract to bring America's Spirit to five Job Corps centers — in New York, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Indiana and Kentucky.



Scene from Hyde School's 'America's Spirit'

They will do the production and talk to both Corps students and staff about coming back to Hyde to participate in a training program, one that would lead to a national tour of a production using both Hyde and Job Corps people.

"That will depend upon whether the people in our centers want to pursue it," Smith said. "If they think they've already gotten all they want out of it, the five concerts will be all we'll do. But if it looks like our people can benefit from a joint effort with Hyde, we'll go ahead with more.

"What we hope will happen is that the Hyde program will help develop the kids' confidence in themselves, help develop motivation. Also, we've found that the longer they stay at the centers, the more good they get from the program. They'll usually get better jobs and stay on the job longer. So maybe this program can do something to help keep them with us. That's what we're hoping anyway."

The Job Corps is scheduled to double in size during the next year — to a capacity of 44,000 students in 100 centers scattered around the nation.

Hyde's contract, headmaster Edward Legg said, is part of a plan to make sure the Job Corps does more than just provide shelter and job training.

"They want a better quality program that will attract more people and then deliver the results they're promising," he said. "Technical training isn't enough. They also need confidence, they need motivation."

He said 46 people from Hyde — 15 current students, 10 faculty and 21 alumni — will be on the first tour beginning Feb. 27 in Albany, N.Y.

Phase Two of the plan, which hasn't yet been approved or funded, would start in the spring when a team of 30 Job Corps students and faculty come to Bath for the America's Spirit training program.

Phase Three would begin in September with the national tour by the combined Job Corps-Hyde group and expansion of the program into other Job Corps centers.



Ruth Warrick
... Liaison With Job Corps

HYDE SCHOOL. BATH.

Bath's Hyde School production of America's Spirit is planned to be the nucleus of a federal Job Corps program.

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