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Local residents to attend inauguration in D.C.

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Groups from all over North Carolina will join residents from other states in a road trip to Washington, D.C., on Tuesday to witness history - the inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president.

Are you going?

If you plan to attend the inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama, let us know. Call 249-3981, ext. 215, or send an e-mail to news@the-dispatch.com. Please include your cell phone number so a reporter could contact you in Washington, D.C.

National media reported most hotel rooms in the District of Columbia area filled quickly after the election. Millions are expected to gather on the national mall Jan. 20 to watch the swearing-in ceremony.

Lexington residents Wanda and Norris Turmans will make the trip this weekend. Wanda said her aunt, who lives about 10 miles from Washington, invited the family up to witness history.

"We're planning on leaving Sunday night," Wanda said. "I just worry about how busy I hear it'll be."

Traffic volume kept the Turmans from committing to the trip at first, but the magnitude of the event swayed her.

"I would be making the trip to D.C. because it's history. It's an event that we can relate to our children and grandchildren. It's such a huge thing, not only for African-Americans, but for all Americans," Wanda said. "I want to be part of it if I can."

Charlotte-based Queen City Tours booked the last seat on the one-day round trip to Washington Monday, said Queen City Director Jay Wipple.

"We got lots of calls and e-mails after (Obama) was elected asking if we were putting together a trip," Wipple said. "We organized one and were pleased at the response we got."

James Wilkie, chairman of the Dunbar Alumni group, said in September he started thinking about organizing a trip. A tour bus was reserved, and the idea received modest interest at first, but he was amazed at the response after Nov. 4.

"Oh, I'm definitely surprised because we didn't have but one bus, and three days after the election it was almost full," Wilkie said.

With minimum advertising, the word spread.

"We've got people from all over going. One passenger bus is full, and the second is almost there," Wilkie said. "There's over 100 people going, and we have five seats left."

Wilkie said the group will leave at 7 a.m. Monday from a church in Landis and stop at Walmart in Lexington to pick up Davidson County riders. The group arrives home Wednesday.

"I can't wait till Monday morning," said Lexington resident Charlotte Roberts. She will be among the Dunbar alumni boarding the bus bound for Washington.

"This is history. I'm 62 years old, and I'm going to retire next year," Roberts said. "When I was growing up, things were still segregated."

Next week, she wants to see with her own eyes the first African-American elected to the nation's highest office take the oath.

"I think if there's anybody who can bring this country together, it's him," Roberts said. "Obama has been very good about working with all kinds of people, and we need that attitude of cooperation in times like these."

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