

OPRAH WINFREY SALUTES THE MISSION OF ESTELLA PYFROM

DAPHNE L. TAYLOR — OCTOBER 9, 2014



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It's not every day that Oprah Winfrey comes calling! But when she does, most people are sure to answer the call! Recently, the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), called on West Palm Beach's own, Estella Pyfrom, founder and creator of Estella's Brilliant Bus! In the past year and a half, Estella's Brilliant Bus, an elaborate computer lab on wheels which travels to impoverished areas teaching kids computers, has been acknowledged worldwide, including at the White House, for its innovative mobile computer. And clearly, Pyfrom was ecstatic to meet President Barack Obama and former President George H.W. Bush and their two First Ladies. No doubt, it was an undeniable honor. But when Oprah's company called a few weeks ago, Pyfrom couldn't believe it. "How could you not get excited about Oprah?" she quipped from her living room just days after OWN and Harpo Studios wrapped filming her at home and about town for her various philanthropic work. Pyfrom will be featured as part of "Oprah's The Life You Want Weekend" tour, which comes to Miami, October 24 and 25 to the American Airlines Arena. On that Friday evening, "Lady O" will take to the stage in a solo act for two hours. But on that Saturday, Oprah's hand-picked experts and motivational speakers will engage and delight the crowd with ways to change their lives. It is also on Saturday that Pyfrom's story will be featured on the big screens at the arena, as part of an acknowledgment and a "thank you" for do-gooders from the local area. According to Chelsea Hettrick, Director of Communications for OWN, there is a call for online submissions in each market that "Oprah's The Life You Want Weekend" is visiting this fall for people who deserve a "Standing Ovation." Pyfrom has been selected as one of those individuals. "Throughout the event, we will be referencing various local community members who are making a difference," said Hettrick. Limited tickets are still available at www.oprahweekend.com.

There are others who will be honored in Miami, but Hettrick said she is not at liberty to provide their names or information at this time. She would also not reveal whether the honorees will personally be greeted by Oprah, but it is a fact that Oprah's team is giving Pyfrom star treatment – sending a chauffeur-driven car to pick her up from her West Palm Beach home, driving her to the arena in Miami!

A producer from Harpo Studios in Chicago, and four other crew members spent two full days with Pyfrom, interviewing her, her family, staff, and those impacted by her high tech mobile computer lab. The crew filmed her at Village Academy in Delray Beach, a very unique model school which goes from Head Start through 12th grade.

It's been a whirlwind for the 77-year old Pyfrom, who, for the past year and a half has been non-stop with the "Brilliant Bus," even taking it on the road in August to New Orleans for the Essence Festival's first ever #YESWECODE Tech Village. She took nearly 100 kids with her, and both the boys and girls groups from Estella's Brilliant Bus won first place in a coding contest – building mobile apps, and competing with kids from around the world. Ironically, Pyfrom didn't learn the computer until the age of 70, and it was at age 71 that she took her retirement pension and savings, bought a tour bus, and outfitted it with 18 high tech computers, thus starting her "computer bus," hoping to bridge the technology gap between the privileged and those from underserved communities. "We go to places where there's a great need. We're not looking to glide on 'Easy Street.' We want to know how we could help them improve and overcome some of their greatest challenges," said Pyfrom, regarding those whom she serves. She says she is committed to bridging the digital divide.

It was in 2012 that she actually got the bus off the ground and running, as she initially put the project on hold during an illness suffered by her husband. Since then, however, she's taken her bus from stadiums to schools and underprivileged neighborhoods teaching computers to those in need. The accolades, awards and honors have poured in ever since. In addition to the White House visit last year, where she was named a National Point of Light, she was also recognized as a CNN Top 10 Hero, hosted by CNN's Anderson Cooper, and she was featured on NBC's Nightly News with Brian Williams.

She's been featured in numerous articles in both newspapers and magazines and has won countless awards, including being named a 2014 African American Achiever in Broward County. The Disney Corporation is doing a documentary on her life, and on October 13-16, she will fly to San Francisco for Dreamforce 2014, one of the largest technology and motivational events in the world. She'll be a featured speaker, along with the likes of Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, Anthony Robbins, will.i.am, and many other celebrities, technology and world leaders. She has also been contacted by the Steve Harvey show as well as the Queen Latifah Show. "I'm appreciative of all of the local as well as the national media," said Pyfrom, who maintains she is still shy, despite all the publicity. But, she says, she has come out of her shell a lot, since beginning the project. "I'm getting better at it (speaking in front of cameras)" she said.

But despite all the fanfare from around the globe, Pyfrom says it amazes and disappoints her that she gets more interest, and even more financial support for her "Brilliant Bus" from far away places like Africa and United Kingdom, and all throughout the United States, rather than from right here at home. "I'm not sure why that is, but it makes me a bit sad. I need more local support." she said. She also indicated that if she could have any wish for her project, it would be for funding to pay her staff, which are all volunteers. Estella's Brilliant Bus is a non-profit business, where volunteers and donations are greatly appreciated, she said.

For more information or to help out Estella's Brilliant Bus in any way, please reach her at 561-985-1889 or atwepyfrom@comcast.net.