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Locals heading to Washington

At least five local residents will be attending Barack Obama's inauguration

By KRISTINA SMITH HORN
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FREMONT -- Brenda Bilal hasn't lost the euphoria she felt the night Barack Obama was elected president.

For Bilal, Obama's election meant a number of inspiring things -- the first black president, a message of hope and positive change coming during the worst economic times since the Great Depression and a chance to bring the troops home from Iraq.

So when Bilal, a teacher and mentor program coordinator for Fremont City Schools, learned she might have a chance to go to what likely will be the best-attended inauguration of all time, she took it.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime event, and I just really wanted to experience it and be there to witness history," said Bilal, a Sandusky County Democratic Party member. "I'm so proud that we will have an African-American president. He's inspired us to think that things could get better."

Bilal and Fremont residents Dallas and Mae Leake were on the waiting list for a charter bus headed to the inauguration. The three were thrilled when enough cancellations gave them a spot on the bus and a chance to see Obama being sworn in.

The Leakes, who worked on Obama's campaign, received tickets to see the actual inauguration from U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown. The 240,000 tickets for the event were scarce and highly coveted, as millions are expected to attend the event.

Bilal will join the throngs who will stand in Washington D.C.'s National Mall, watching Obama officially become president via Jumbotrons placed around the area.

"I'm satisfied just to be in the crowd," she said.

For the Leakes, watching Obama's inauguration will be the culmination of months they spent campaigning door-to-door and coordinating volunteers to help spread Obama's message. Although Dallas Leake, head of the Sandusky County NAACP Chapter, is thrilled the country will have its first black president, he said he worked so hard for Obama because of Obama's ability to unite people and inspire hope in troubled times.

"As soon as he won, we said we were going to D.C., jokingly," Dallas Leake said.

But after some thought, they decided they didn't want to miss the event, even if it meant driving there themselves and standing with the crowd on the National Mall. They were thrilled when Brown's office notified them tickets were available.

For Dallas Leake, it will be his first visit to Washington. The charter bus leaves Sunday, allowing its riders to spend Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the city and participate in its events, as well.

"I want to see it all -- the historic buildings, all the sights," he said. "Seeing the first family is going to be really exciting."

Mae Leake was not available for comment.

At least five Fremont-area residents are attending the inauguration. Carly Nevarez, a Fremont Ross High School sophomore, and Ashley Alejandro, a Clyde High School senior were both accepted into programs that will allow them to see the inauguration, attend inaugural balls and educational programs about government and politics.

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