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SOUTHFIELD

Tour company looks to promote Detroit by hitting the streets

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SOUTHFIELD — You might’ve noticed recently that the city of Detroit has seen a surge of support. Near and far, from T-shirts to Cadillac commercials, the struggling city is gaining hordes of fans who believe Detroit is headed for a comeback. And what better way to show your allegiance than to head downtown and explore all that Detroit has to offer?

That’s exactly what Linda Yellin set out to do when she started giving informal tours of Detroit’s Eastern Market to friends in her spare time. Now, 10 years later, the clinical social worker has grown her small walking trips into Feet on the Street Tours, a Southfield-based company that offers a variety of outings, classes, tours and other programs that highlight Detroit’s rich culture and social life.

“The tours are not only showing Detroit off to visitors, but also to people in the suburbs who want to connect or reconnect with the city,” said Yellin.

She and her team of Detroit-savvy guides still offer excursions around Eastern Market, of course, but they’ve added other tours for varying interests. Most are public, and are taken either on foot, by car or by bus, but Feet on the Street can also create private tours for special occasions, like birthdays or reunions.

Each tour has a different focus, with many centered on cuisine. The company often has progressive food crawls that offer a taste of specialty neighborhoods in Detroit, such as Mexican town, Eastern Market with a Jewish twist, and German-centric areas.

In honor of Black History Month, Yellin and crew will offer a special tour celebrating African-American history from Detroit and beyond. The evening will begin with an early dinner at Beans & Cornbread in Southfield, followed by a narrated bus tour with stops at the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights and the Virgil H. Carr Cultural Arts Center in Paradise Valley. Afterwards, guests will go to the Detroit Institute of Arts for a live jazz concert and a docent-led tour of the General Motors Gallery of African American Art.

“That’s another example of the unique things we can do,” said Yellin of the special Black History Month Tour Feb. 24. “Not only the curb-to-curb service, so no one has to walk in the cold, but most people can’t just call and request a docent-led tour. Those are opportunities that we’re able to provide in a creative, fun way for people in the community.”

As much as Feet on the Street would like guests to have a good time, the tour company also hopes that patrons will learn a thing or two from the trips. Yellin has taken her social work background and developed a series of educational tour programs where social workers in training can earn credit toward their state licensing. One such tour is Thinking Fresh about Detroit, which explores food and hunger issues with the help of Eastern Market and

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Gleaners Community Food Bank. The Exploring Southwest tour partners with Southwest Solutions to see and discuss issues unique to a largely Hispanic neighborhood, and another tour works with Alternatives for Girls to learn about dealing with at-risk youth.

“Instead of these people going into a class and talking, a tour allows them to see things and it becomes a much more powerful working experience,” said Yellin.

Also taking advantage of Feet on the Street’s educational tours are students at the International Academy. According to International Center Coordinator Jacquelyn Laymac, the schools, located around metro Detroit, require students to take six “enrichment” experiences over the course of four years, akin to community service required by some schools for graduation. Students can choose to take a tour called That’s Entertainment, which introduces kids to Michigan’s popular entertainment industry. Students visit a variety of places to learn about film, radio, theater and more while getting to talk one-on-one with people working in those industries.

“They love it,” Laymac said of the students who take the tour. “Anytime I can give them an enrichment where they get to get out and tour, they love it. Sometimes they get to go backstage and talk to actors and directors.”

Next on Yellin’s tour itinerary is to expand the tours Feet on the Street offers. Favorites like the Prohibition and All That Jazz tour will continue to draw crowds, but Yellin hopes to show visitors as much of Detroit as she can, because it’s what she loves to do.

“I do this because I have a personal interest in increasing a positive opinion about the city, which helps the economy, which in turn bridges the gap between the city and the suburbs.”

For more information on the Experience: Sights, Sounds and Tastes in Honor of Black History Month tour Feb. 24 as well as other tours offered by Feet on the Street Tours, visit www.FeetOnTheStreetTours.com or call (248) 353-8687.



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