

Travel Website Builds on Blogger's Love for the Great Outdoors

By Lisa Loving
Of *The Skanner News*

Rue Mapp travels around the country as a blogger for her website, www.OutdoorAfro.com. But just this year her efforts at encouraging more people to get active and shape a relationship with nature has taken off, with invitations to the White House and an advisory role on First Lady Michelle Obama's 'Let's Move' initiative. Last week *The Skanner News* spoke with Mapp, an Oakland, Calif., resident, during her road



the time and money in the world what would you do? And it just rolled off my tongue: "Oh I would probably put together a website to connect African Americans to the outdoors." And she looked at me like - what?

It was this moment of realizing that I hadn't given something that was a part of me and something that I'd really taken for granted a voice outside of my own head. Within a week I went and put together one of those blogger blogs. There was a sense of urgency that came over me that, yes, this is who I am and this is what I have to do. It began as simply me sharing about my own personal experiences and some of my thinking about African Americans and the outdoors and almost immediately their response was, "me too!"

There were voices from all over the country who said, "hey I thought I was the only one who enjoyed the outdoors." And then I realized very quickly that if you put all the only ones together we are actually quite numerous. And so over time OutdoorAfro has shifted to be an illuminator of the bright spots of African American participation in the outdoors and a way to inspire people and affirm peoples' experiences in nature in a variety of ways.

TSN: The thing that strikes me about this issue of exercise is—it's very serious. The government is writing press releases about the need for people to get out and get more active. It's a very serious thing—and yet when I look through your website what I see is people having fun.

RM: Yeah. And I think that is what we cannot lose in these conversations is the sense of wonder and fun and inspiration.

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trip to Big Sur.

The Skanner News: What is it that made you come up with the concept of OutdoorAfro.com?

Rue Mapp: A whole lifetime of experiences that were informed by a few concepts. One was a love of nature, the second was the love and application of technology. And the third is a desire to always connect people - I am a networker by birth. And so it was really a coming together of things I really care about, the natural expression of who I was. And enhanced by my education, studying art education at UC Berkeley, where I was really helped to understand the role of visual representation to shape peoples' feelings and also to reflect back popular culture.

And so in 1009 I was having a conversation with a friend who said, if you had all

Fiesta Cubana

Trinity Cathedral Arts presents "Una Fiesta de Esperanza/ A Party of Hope". This exhibit of fine art and craft from Cuba offers creative expressions of Cuban culture - community life, sports, music, dance - in a variety of media. There will be paintings and tapestries by artists such as Carlos Caceres, Alejandrina Cue and Marisol, sculptures, jewelry and clothing by Havana designers, dolls, home decor and percussion instruments. The exhibit is produced in collaboration with the Cuban Art Space in New York City and benefits their art programs for children with Down's Syndrome.



Because the person who loves to connect with nature and loves the outdoors is going to have just as much if not more benefit as the person who's doing it to lose weight. And it doesn't make people feel good to be put in a sensitive position. To be put in a deficit position - "well why don't you?" And, "you need to!" And so I'm really interested in helping people recognize the outdoor engagement that they already have because everyone is connected to the outdoors in some way, identify what that is and

build on that relationships in a way that's relevant to that person and that fits within their lives and brings them joy.

TSN: What are a couple of beginning outdoor experiences that anyone could do that you recommend?

RM: I think that's a really good question, as far as what beginning looks like it's going to be different for different people, and it's back to what I said before - it's what it is you like. I do tabling events at

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