

her life Defining their own HISTORY

"We know we are right; we know we shall be successful, we know the day is not far distant, when this government and the world will acknowledge the exact and permanent political equality of man and woman ..."

— Matilda Joslyn Gage



BY OLIVIA BITETTI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL WARE

Rather than sit poolside this spring break, two CNY teens will enrich their culture.

Right next to "Practice for Concert Orchestra" and "School Yearbook Edits," Nottingham High School senior Abiba Salahou and Fayetteville-Manlius High School junior Mikayla Jaz Cleary-Hammarstedt have written "Trip to Chile" in their agenda books. After being selected to represent Fayetteville's Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation as its girl ambassadors, the pair will travel with foundation director Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner on March 14 for a week-long trip to Chile.

Salahou and Cleary-Hammarstedt — alongside 20 other ambitious young ladies — belong to the Girl Ambassador for Human Rights Program, a membership

awarded after succeeding in a highly-selective competition. From there, they were chosen to represent the Gage Foundation on the Chile excursion based on their involvement throughout the year, including insights made during discussions and a series of short essays explaining their desire to visit Chile, Salahou said.

The trip is part of a year-long Museums Connect initiative which will bring together 50 teen-age girls from the three participating museums through a grant made possible in part by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and administered by the American Alliance of Museums.

"I believe when it comes to real connections and bridges, barriers like language and ethnicity only enhance the conversation and curiosity," Salahou said. "I want to leave knowing I've met girls so different from myself, yet managed to create commonalities that we can both remember always."

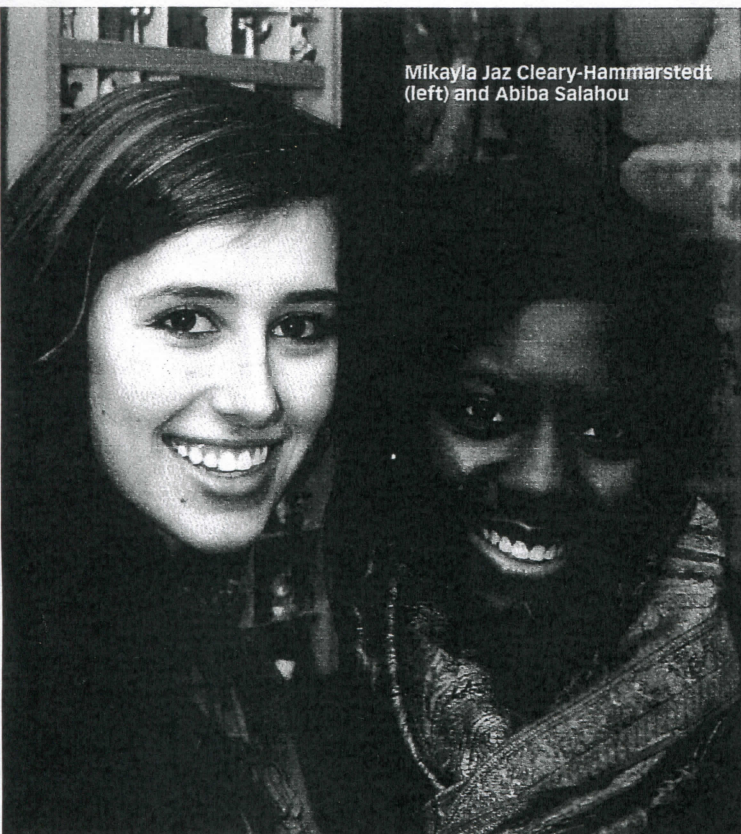
The upcoming trip to Chile will be Cleary-Hammarstedt's first time leaving the country, and she shares Salahou's excitement for meeting the girls they've been in contact with since the beginning of the program.

"I can't wait to see in what ways girls' lives are similar and different from mine," she said. "I hope to gain a sense of awareness about other peoples' lives other than my small 'F-M bubble' that I live in."

Since their affiliation with the Gage Foundation and learning the history of its notable namesake Matilda Joslyn Gage — a women's rights and civil rights activist recognized among the likes of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton — both girls' have grown a greater respect and appreciation for women's history.

"Women's history is fascinating to me, to see how unjust our pasts have been and yet to see how far we've come," Cleary-Hammarstedt said.

"Women need to know more about women's history so we can unite ourselves and rise against the adversity piled against us," Salahou added. "If we are truly unified, we can follow the example of the great women before us, like Matilda Joslyn Gage, and fix the problems." ■



Mikayla Jaz Cleary-Hammarstedt (left) and Abiba Salahou

If you go

WHAT: The Matilda Joslyn Gage Center is partnering with local theater company, The D.R.E.A.M. Freedom Revival, for a special performance in honor of Gage's birthday.

WHEN: 5 p.m. March 24

WHERE: Grace Episcopal Church, 819 Madison St., Syracuse

COST: Free and open to the public