Tia Wilson displays her Black Lives Matter flag in front of the Eiffel Tower while on a visit to Paris last year. She strives to take a picture with her flag near a significant monument whenever she travels abroad.

Recently, she took a spring break trip with other AnBryce Scholars to San Francisco, where they met with several companies, including Apple and Golden Gate Capital. "AnBryce is more than just a scholars program," Wilson said. "It is truly a family, and the resources I gain from AnBryce partners are out of this world."

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During the fall break, Wilson took a Notre Dame-sponsored pilgrimage in France, where she learned about Catholicism and the journey of the Holy Cross congregation.

This summer, she will volunteer through Notre Dame's International Summer Service Learning Program (ISSLP) to teach English in Kyarusozi, Western Uganda. She was one of only 69 of 260 applicants to be chosen for an ISSLP project. For eight weeks, she will teach at a high school run by the Congregation of the Holy Cross, where she will use Ta-Nehisi Coates’ Black Panther graphic novels and others to work on the students' English comprehension. Through peer-to-peer editing and mentorship, she will help students write their own stories. "Since the literature is not largely available at the school, we will create it," she said.

Wilson's aim is to put herself in the shoes of her much-admired Eureka High language arts teacher, Becky Stevenson, helping to bridge the gap between African Americans and African students. "In order to be a better citizen of this world, cross-cultural understanding will need to exist on both sides," Wilson said. "Through this experience I am hoping to understand the lives and culture of Western Uganda and help my students understand a bit more about the lives of African Americans."

In her upcoming junior year, she will spend the fall semester studying in Dublin, Ireland, taking business courses and classes on racism and social justice movements. While there, she will volunteer at the nonprofit Youth and Educational Service for Refugees and Migrants, which helps migrant youth better acclimate to Irish culture through English classes, homework help and assistance with other cultural competency skills. "The skills I gain teaching English in Uganda will help me with my work in the organization in Dublin, so I am looking forward to my future," Wilson said.

Wilson got a good start on her academic and professional future while attending Rockwood schools. At Eureka High School, Wilson participated in the student equity team, theater and track. She was a mentor for Eureka's eCrew freshmen mentoring program and co-founder of Women Empowering Women, a group of upperclasswomen who mentor a group of black freshman girls through their first year of high school. Tia received the VICC Academic Achievement Award every year in elementary school.

Wilson is the first Eureka student to receive the competitive QuestBridge Scholarship, which is awarded to fewer than 5 percent of applicants. "Tia deserves all the opportunity to reach her full potential, because it's unlimited," said Becky Stevenson, the language arts teacher at EHS who so impressed Tia Wilson. She taught Wilson in a ninth-grade honors class and employed her as an aide for two years. "She was one of those right from the start that you knew had something special. She is ambitious and determined. She was really invested in her own learning, in herself, in being the best person she can. And she's been invested in the future she wants for herself since I met her. She's one of the hardest workers I've ever been around."
in Kirkwood theater and academics

North Kirkwood Middle School sixth grader Earl Byrd has been turning heads in classrooms and on stages at school and beyond.

“He is an incredibly kind and considerate young man,” said Shonda Ambers-Phillips, executive director of Student Services for the Kirkwood School District, echoing the sentiments of Michelle Fink, Earl’s school counselor.

With a GPA of 3.60 (so far), Earl is in the school’s “Soror” gifted program. He recently was honored with a certificate from the Kirkwood High School Black Achievement and Cultural Club for African-American students who have earned a 3.0 or higher GPA this year. He also has been named Student of the Week.

Earl entered the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corp. program in kindergarten at Tillman Elementary, then advanced to North Kirkwood Middle School in sixth grade. Earl’s parents, Frances and Earl Byrd, sent him to Kirkwood schools because “Kirkwood is a good district,” said Frances Byrd. They should know, because Earl’s four older sisters graduated from Kirkwood High School, also through the VICC program.

Earl’s favorite class is science. “Earl is a curious science student who is always making connections and asking ‘why’ questions,” said his science teacher, Chris Reinagel. “He is not content to just know the ‘what’ about a topic we are studying, he also wants to know the ‘why’ and the ‘how.’ You can almost see the gears turning when he probes to find out more about our investigations.” A conscientious lab partner, Earl works well with his classmates, she added.

Reinagel noted that “Earl is a natural at public speaking and has the ability to command a room. He organizes his thoughts well and uses his voice to keep the audience’s attention.”

So it’s not surprising that Earl has parlayed his public speaking ability and sense of humor into success on the stage.

As a member of the NKMS Players, North Middle’s theater troupe, Earl played Dr. Sanson Carrasco in their production of “The Man of La Mancha.” But that wasn’t his first show. Inspired by the stories of one of his older sisters who is active in theater, Earl caught the theater bug in fifth grade and performed in “Seussical the Musical” at Tillman.

He has been singing in his church choir since about the age of 3, his mother said, and performs in church plays. “He has a beautiful singing voice, but he won’t tell you this,” she said. Earl also plays trumpet in band class.

In his spare time, Earl also enjoys skating and video games. Although it’s a little early to make career plans, “If the opportunity does present itself, I would like to do something with stage performances,” Earl said.

Earl and his family spent part of their spring break visiting Branson, where they attended the musical “Samson.”