

Outdoors with Julia Yarbough: Breaking the outdoors color barrier

Contributed by JULIA YARBOUGH

Pick up almost any nationally distributed outdoor magazine, flip through the pages, and you may see something that is more often than not absent: images of people of color, African-American, Latino, Native American and Asian, enjoying the myriad of outdoor pursuits to which all Americans have access.

It's not that we are not out there scuba diving, camping, fishing, hiking, biking, skiing, mountaineering and working as advocates for environmental issues, it's just that all too often, mainstream media, advertisers and even our own people have accepted the perception that we don't take part in such activities. **WRONG!**

Shattering that false perception has been the passionate goal of environmentalists Frank and Audrey Peterman for more than a decade. If the names sound familiar, they should. The Petermans called South Florida home for many years, championing hosts of local environmental issues, most notably Everglades restoration.

Now, they are emphasizing the need to respect and protect our national parks, and make the environmental world more inclusive of people of color. To that end, the Petermans are hosting a groundbreaking national conference.

Titled "Breaking the Color Barrier in the Great Outdoors," the four-day event in Atlanta is expected to bring together some leading outdoor enthusiasts from around the country to get the dialogue going.

Among the outdoor enthusiasts scheduled to attend the conference is Majora Carter, who wrote a successful \$1.25 million federal transportation planning grant to design the South Bronx Greenway, an 11-mile network of bike and pedestrian paths that connects neighborhoods in a low-income New York neighborhood to the riverfront.

I first met Audrey almost ten years ago. I accompanied her and Frank on my first trip to the Grand Canyon, Bryce and Zion National Parks. She led an excursion of people of color; inner city kids from Los Angeles and novice nature lovers from South Florida, so that we could experience for ourselves how magical it feels to fully be a part of the glory that is Mother Nature.

Audrey and Frank's drive to share the secret of just how empowering enjoying the outdoors can be began after they criss-crossed the country visiting our national parks in 1994. They didn't see many people who looked like them. They knew that needed to change. A new mission was born.

And what the Petermans instinctively felt is backed up by Census figures: Our population is shifting. By 2050, it is estimated that the number of people identifying themselves as a member of an ethnic minority group will reach 47 percent.

If these groups do not connect to nature and the outdoors, who will be prepared not only to care for our natural spaces but also understand the need to protect and save them?

No longer can we afford to allow outdated perceptions to cut us off from all that Mother Nature has to offer. New opportunities are emerging daily to enjoy the outdoors and create business opportunities while experiencing the joy of

“doing” in the outdoors.

Audrey and Frank Peterman are paving the way. Now it's time for more of us to get on that road!

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Editor's Note: Julia Yarbough, a news anchor at NBC 6, writes periodically on her outdoor and other adventures. To read more of Julia's columns, log onto SFLTimes.com.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Breaking the Color Barrier in the Great Outdoors conference.

WHERE: Doubletree Hotel Atlanta Airport, 3400 Norman Berry Drive, Atlanta, Ga.

WHEN: Sept. 23, 26, 2009

COST: On-site registration is \$325, \$200 for students.

CONTACT: For more information, go to www.breakingthecolorbarrier.com . To contact the hotel, dial 404-763-1600.