

Urban Bush Women Blend Dance, Community

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Dance professionals, artists and community-based leaders from around the nation are gathered on the Tulane University uptown campus this week to learn how to use the arts as a vehicle for social activism. It's all part of the Summer Leadership Institute sponsored by the Urban Bush Women dance company.



The Urban Bush Women dance company, celebrating its 25th anniversary, is on the uptown campus for the troupe's Summer Leadership Institute. Performing "Zollar: Uncensored" are, from left, Marjani Fortson, Catherine Dancy and Paloma McGregor. (Photo by Yi-Chun Wu)

The 10-day session, which began on Friday (July 30), will conclude with performances by institute participants that are open to the public on Saturday (Aug. 7) at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. in Dixon Hall at Tulane. The performances will benefit the Plaquemines Parish-based Zion Travelers Cooperative Center, a community development group that is helping citizens deal with effects of the BP oil spill.

Young students from Plaquemines Parish will give a special stomp dance performance at the Saturday events, which are free of charge but donations are

requested to support the Zion Travelers' ongoing work.

The theme for this year's institute is "Soul Deep: How Do We Build Sustainable Communities?" Sessions include teach-ins around specific political and social justice issues, dance technique classes and training in community dancing traditions.

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, founder and artistic director of the company, said the group came to New Orleans for the second-straight summer because "we want to be a part of the renewal process and hope our institute training, which began here, can make a positive difference."

New Orleans partners in planning for the events included Tulane, the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies, the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, the Ashe Cultural Arts Center and Mondo Bizarro.

During the opening weekend, the institute held a Haitian benefit at the McKenna Museum of African American Art, an Oshun invocation and drumming at Bayou St. John and a social dance workshop at Ashe Cultural Arts Center.

[Urban Bush Women](#) brought the institute to New Orleans after the dance company completed tours in South America and Europe.