

Prince George's

EXTRA

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2009

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Among the team's trips: the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, at left and bottom, and a Bahamas cruise, where Rhoda Isaac and other members learned some dance steps.



Having Fun,
Glad You Are
Here for the Ride

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPARK WALLS

Travel Club Gets Retirees Together on the Road to Almost Anywhere

By WILLIAM WAN
Washington Post Staff Writer

When George Walls retired from the federal government, he bought a few motor coach buses and started taking large groups on trips for extra income. After a few years, he noticed how few of his passengers were African American retirees like himself.

Many of the retirees he knew rarely ventured beyond their neighborhoods.

That changed a decade ago when Walls, 69, of Fort Washington got together with a few friends and created the Elite Tours Travel Club. Today, the club has about 1,700 members, mostly African American retirees,

and offers 50 low-cost trips a year, which range from a \$39 day tour of the District to a three-week, cross-country journey for just under \$2,000.

The group offers a sense of youthful adventure, independence and companionship to men and women who might otherwise whittle away their days, pattering around the house, often alone.

Walls said the idea came to him to help fill a void he saw among his peers.

"A voice said to me, 'Why can't that happen?'" he recalled. "It's a shame they're missing out on so many things out there for people to do and see."

The average age for members is about 60, and the eldest is an active 94-year-old woman who still occasionally travels. At least two couples have met and married through the

club. Others have started dating and might be headed to the altar soon.

Club members have traveled together to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, to watch the induction of their beloved Redskin Darrell Green. They've attended soul group concerts throughout the East Coast and gone backstage to meet the stars. They've driven across the country to see the sun-drenched Grand Canyon.

In these tough economic times, the club even provides financial seminars. One member, a financial adviser, volunteers to teach fellow members how to conserve money and protect their retirement nest eggs.

"Most people in our club are on a fixed income, so any way we can help them save mon-

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