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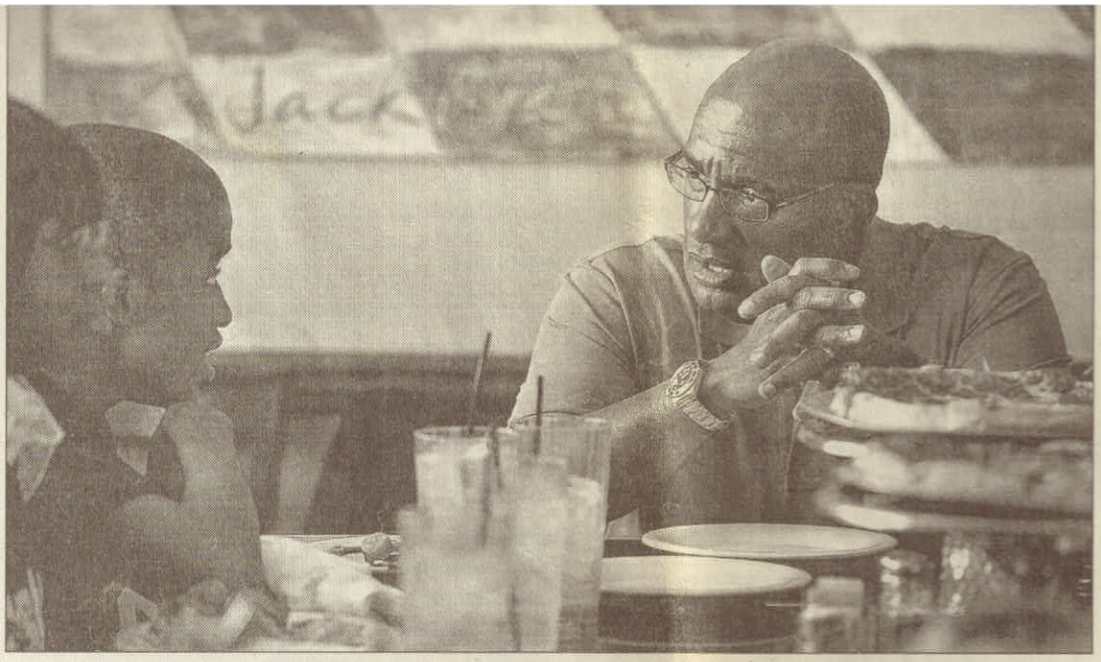

HYUNSOO LEO KIM | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Al Roker, weather guy from the "Today" show, talks with Emeka Onyirimba, 14, left, a freshman at Maury High School, during his lunch meeting Wednesday with a group of Norfolk teens.

TEEN VOLUNTEERS CHAT WITH AL ROKER

NBC weatherman honors young people's work as he visits area

By Elizabeth Simpson
The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK

With "Today" show's Al Roker on his way to a Norfolk eatery to lunch with a local youth group, the teens there joked about what to say when he arrived.

"Hey, it sure is windy today," one of them suggested.

But when the NBC weather and feature reporter burst in the door with a booming voice and broad smile on Wednesday, the topics went further afield than the weather.

How did he get his job with NBC? Is he friends with the others on the show? What did he think of the AIDS and HIV prevention education the youth are involved in?

Roker was in Virginia as part of NBC's coverage of battleground states in the presidential election. He took time out on Wednesday, though, to visit a high school buddy, Deirdre Love, who grew up with him in the same Queens neighborhood in New York City.

Love lives in Chesapeake now, and has remained friends with Roker. She's talked with him about the youth group she's directed for about 10 years, "Teens With a Purpose – The Movement," and he asked to meet them.

So 15 of the young people from schools in Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Chesapeake gathered at Enrico's Ristorante to share the ways they educate other teens about AIDS and HIV.

They host open-mic nights once a month to give teens a place to express themselves and to raise awareness about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. The teens also partner with the AIDS Care Center for Education & Support Services in Norfolk to serve as peer educators at community centers, festivals and college campuses.

"It's a terrific program," Roker said. "What's great about it is it's not adults trying to tell kids what to do. Any time adults try to do that and act cool, it's a disaster. But kids talking to other kids in their own language, in a positive way, has a great ripple effect."

Fifteen-year-old Chinyere Onyirimba of Norfolk said some teens are well educated about sexually transmitted diseases. Those who aren't sometimes share their misconceptions with her. "I look at them, and I'm like, 'That is completely wrong, where did you get that from?' If I hear something wrong, I get into my peer educator mode."

Roker talked about his work with NBC, and about how he became interested in communications. He said the head of the media department of his college told him, "You have the perfect face for radio."

But his jovial mug turned out to be pretty good for TV too.

"I think it's really cool that he's interested in meeting us and interested in what we're doing," said 15-year-old Brittnay Chavez of Virginia Beach.

"We're trying to put out a positive message, and for him to recognize that is really good."

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more information

For information about "Teens With a Purpose – The Movement," e-mail twpthemovement @yahoo.com.

SUFFOLK

Coasta rain a

By Patrick Wilson
The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK

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