

## News

### GRDC News - November 2004

#### **Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress: Growing Strong!**



In 2001, Mayor William A. Johnson appointed a Commission on Race and Ethnicity and charged them with the task of eliminating racism in the community. To tackle this problem, a diverse group of business, community, and religious leaders teamed with Bob Rosenfeld and several other commission members, including Rev. Kenneth Dean from the Mayor's office, got together to design, develop, and implement Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress. The purpose of the program, which matched 160 business and civic leaders of different races and ethnic groups, was to break down the racial misunderstandings within the Greater Rochester community and to create the genesis of a prejudice-free community by 2010.

#### **What distinguishes Biracial Partnerships from other diversity training**

Three features distinguish Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress from other diversity training or race relations programs.



First is the length of the relationships. The partners commit to meeting 16 times over the course of a year, for coffee, a meal, a movie, or some other informal social activity. These meetings are supplemented by seven cluster group meetings of ten to twelve partners, where a particular program theme is discussed, and racial and ethnic issues can be shared. Each cluster group had a trained coach to guide and assist the process. There are also two large group meetings -- one at the beginning of the year, and a final meeting at the end of the year where all participants celebrate their new friendships and new understanding of the community's racial issues.



The second, and perhaps most important feature, is the depth of the relationship. In addition to establishing one-on-one relationships, this program offers special communication tools designed to help partners understand each other on a deeper level. This understanding helps to establish trust, and as it builds between the partners, true change can take place.

The third feature is that the program begins with community leaders and change makers. This helps garner support for the program to be rolled out to the entire Rochester area.



## Results of Phase I

The results of Phase 1 were impressive -- 140 individuals, or 82%, of the participants completed the program. Even more impressive, the final evaluation forms indicated that all participants experienced some positive outcome. While some saw small changes in their lives, others believed the program was life-changing.

Many of the partners involved their families in their friendship, and these relationships expanded to include shared birthdays, holidays, weddings and funerals. And because participants were community leaders, the partnerships sometimes reached even farther to affect change in the broader community.



Some of the partnerships have pooled their collective resources to initiate programs in the Rochester area. Danny Wegman, (l) President of Wegmans Food Markets, and his partner, Rochester City Councilman Wade Norwood, (r) continued to meet in their cluster group. Everyone in this group has an interest in educating Rochester City School District students and improving their lives. Norwood envisions a future Rochester where everyone in the community can partner across racial lines. "The results are spectacular," says Wegman. "If you want to change your mind, you've got to have a different kind of experience. This program does that."

## Phase II addresses racial and religious stereotypes

In 2002, Mayor Johnson recommended that the Biracial Partnerships Program be offered to Muslims and non-Muslims to address religious misunderstandings. Phase II used the same format to break down racial and religious stereotypes generated by the tragic terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

## Completion of Phase III and plans for Phase IV

This month, the Biracial Partnerships Program celebrates the completion of Phase III. The process to help bridge and link the diverse racial and cultural elements in our community is underway.

And this is just the beginning! Plans are in the works to kick off Phase IV in early 2005 for 500 people, and to increase that number to 1000 the following year. Eventually, the structure will be in place for thousands more Rochesterians to take the Biracial Partnerships journey.

## Rochester a model for Greensboro NC

Meanwhile, as Rochester continues its own journey to a prejudice-free community, it serves as a model for another city almost a thousand miles away. It all started in April of 2004, when Idea Connections CEO Bob Rosenfeld gave a keynote address at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, NC. He spoke about the program his firm helped to create for the City of Rochester... Two of the guests saw its application to Greensboro. They first approached the Greensboro Mayor and then contacted Idea Connections about implementing the Biracial Partnership Program in their city.

In April of this year Greensboro Mayor Keith Holiday, and Shirley Frye of the Joseph M. Bryan Foundation, traveled to Rochester to meet Mayor Johnson and other leaders who participated in Rochester's Biracial Partnership Program. In Mayor Holliday's words, "We left fired up!" The next step was to approach their city council. They unanimously agreed to move forward.

Greensboro is a little larger than Rochester, and like Rochester, its population is about half people of color and half white. Greensboro's refugee population represents 80 different nations. In 2008 Greensboro will mark its bicentennial and between now and then the city wants to improve the communication and trust among its diverse community members. In 2005 Greensboro will start its third century by planting the seeds of trust and lay the foundation for a more inclusive community.



Greensboro officials held a press conference on September 13, 2004, announcing the City's decision to implement the Mosaic Partnerships Program over the course of the next three years. (Mosaic Partnerships is the name of the program outside of Rochester). Rochester's Mayor Johnson and his assistant, Rev. Kenneth Dean, were invited to join Greensboro's Mayor Holliday to field questions about the process and results in Rochester. This exchange generated articles in newspapers around the South, including Florida and Louisiana. Other cities have since contacted Idea Connections to find out about implementing a program in their areas.

The Greensboro Bicentennial Mosaic Partnership Program kicks off on Thursday November 18th, 2004 with 180 people and is being funded by a consortium of local foundations. This is the model Idea Connections embraces and hopes to use for Phase IV of the Rochester Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress.

### **Getting involved**

To help realize the dream of establishing Rochester as a prejudice-free zone, a non-profit organization, Odyssey of Humanity, has been formed to raise funds and implement the program. If you or your organization is interested in making a tax-deductible financial or in-kind contribution to Phase IV of the Rochester Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress program, please contact Miguel Rivera, Treasurer of Odyssey of Humanity, at 585-967-6193. New partners are also being actively pursued. If you or your company would like to participate, please contact board member Charlotte Clarke at 585-305-1148.