

EDITORIALS

Building a community

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Jackhammers and forklifts are rattling inside what in a few months will become a new downtown Civil Rights Museum in Greensboro.

Meanwhile, we're still struggling on the outside, sometimes every bit as loudly, to build a community.

But often our quieter moments are the most meaningful, when our efforts to connect with one another tend to be more for sure than for show.

Toward that end, Mayor Keith Holliday has championed a "Bicentennial Mosaic Partnership" initiative among Greensboro leaders.

The idea is simple: Patterned after a successful effort in Rochester, N.Y., the program pairs 150 local leaders with one another in an effort to create dialogue and build friendships. They were matched and then introduced to one another in late 2004.

The list of participants is long and impressive. The mayor, Police Chief David Wray, business leaders, City Council members and county commissioners have stepped forward. There are preachers, teachers and even journalists.

It has an amorphous, touchy-feely quality, this mass blind date among people of different races, ethnicities and walks of life.

So it's a fat target for cynics who like to pounce on notions that are rooted more in ideals than pure pragmatism.

Realistically, some participants won't see the whole program through. Their hearts may not have been in it from the start. Or they may become distracted by other demands and slowly, gently let the commitment fade.

Chances are some of the matches may not even last beyond the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl. But chances are many more of them will.

Some say they fail to see the need for such a program. But it is, frankly, harder not to see the need.

As more than one survey of our values and attitudes has revealed, we are not as trusting of one another as we ought to be, and that hinders our ability to get things done.

And despite Greensboro's legacy as a cradle of the civil rights movement, we are not comfortable as a community discussing issues such as race.

Others wonder why the Mosaic Partnership is so focused on traditional leaders rather than more grass-roots-oriented -- why it involves so many of the "usual suspects." That may be a legitimate complaint. But even among leaders who may know one another casually, this effort seeks to move beyond that.

Then the goal is to reach deeper and deeper into the community with future classes.

As we pause today -- and beyond -- to consider the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., maybe we should recommit to listening more than shouting. And learning more than lecturing.

And realizing that among our biggest assets are the differences we bring to the table -- the experiences, the knowledge and the talents.

That's the beauty of the Mosaic experiment: As we discover those unique differences, there's also a chance to discover our similarities as well.

As King once said: "The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents, and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human, and therefore, brothers."