

GOVERNMENT

Race project follows N.Y. model

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GREENSBORO -- A race relations project to be unveiled next week by Mayor Keith Holliday will be modeled after a similar effort launched by the mayor of Rochester, N.Y. Holliday and other city officials have been tight-lipped about the plan, saying that a full explanation will come at a news conference on Monday. But the News & Record has learned that a Rochester consulting firm, Idea Connections, will help direct a similar project here to bridge racial division in the community.

Dubbed the Greensboro Bicentennial Mosaic Partnerships Project, it aims to build trust and communication between ethnic groups by pairing participants with someone of a different ethnic group. Mosaic Partnerships is a trademark of Idea Connections, and the firm's CEO will direct the effort here.

According to a summary distributed to participants here, the project will follow the model of the Rochester project. There, top civic and business leaders were matched in pairs with a person of a different ethnic background and encouraged to socialize and attend seminars on race relations and the community. The idea is to allow people of different races to build trust and friendship.

The program was led in 2001 by Rochester's mayor, William Johnson. Known as Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress, it included 160 civic leaders in its first phase and later included more residents.

A news release issued by the city said Holliday would be joined Monday by the mayor of the city that pioneered the approach. It went on to say the Greensboro project "will be a key part of the mayor's preparations for Greensboro's Bicentennial in 2008."

Johnson and Holliday could not be reached for comment on Thursday.

Charlotte Clarke, who helped start the Rochester program, said community leaders are excited that another city is following their lead. Clarke, who is white and the director of community affairs at WOKR-TV, was paired with an African American woman who is a vice president at Rochester-based Bausch & Lomb.

"My partner and I just bonded immediately," and we remain close, Clarke said.

Over the course of the project, civic leaders met for seminars and informal meetings run by Idea Connections. The firm's CEO, Bob Rosenfeld, was a member of a task force appointed by the mayor and later helped direct the effort.

Clarke said the project started among top community leaders with the hope that their influence would flow into the rest of the city.

"Once these people experienced this, then their buy-in would trickle down to the rest of the community," Clarke said.

Greensboro's project would follow a similar plan, according to the summary, starting first with "established community leaders," followed by "growing leaders," and finally the general public.

The first meeting for the project is scheduled to take place Tuesday morning and will be directed by Rosenfeld. The publisher of the News & Record, Robin Saul, has been invited to participate in the project.

The summary said the cost of the project would be shared by the city and unspecified private groups. The total cost was not detailed in the summary.

"Community foundations will pay the largest portion of the cost," the summary said. It said the city would contribute staff time and \$10,000 for each of the three years.

City officials who are working on the effort refused to provide details.

Council member Florence Gatten said she is excited to take part in the program.

"Anytime you have people talking to people they ordinarily don't see as they go about their daily lives, it's so important and so effective" in breaking down racial barriers, Gatten said.

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