

Rochester program could help promote harmony here

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A contingent from the city of Euclid, including Mayor Paul Oyaski, traveled last week to Rochester, N.Y., to examine a way to bring people of different races together.

In recent years, Euclid, as have other communities that have seen increasing numbers of minorities living within its borders, has experienced situations in which racial insensitivity has been suspected to be at the forefront.

Most recently, the U.S. Department of Justice confirmed it is examining the way city council at large and Euclid Board of Education elections are held. No minority has been elected to office in Euclid, which has a 30 percent minority population.

In Rochester, Oyaski, Ward 4 Councilman Christopher Gruber, Euclid Library Director Donna Perdzock, Euclid Police Chief David Maine and members of the local non-profit organization B.R.I.D.G.E.S. (Building Racial Interaction through Dialogue, Growth and Education Solutions) heard about Mosaic Partnerships.

Mosaic Partnerships was devised after Rochester mayor William A. Johnson assembled a commission on race and ethnicity in 2001.

One commission member was communications company Idea Connections CEO Bob Rosenfeld. Idea Connections developed the program which

essentially begins by teaming community leaders of unlike races, but who have some similarities.

By working together, it is the goal that a friendship will develop and, therefore, a bond. After community leaders have gone through the partnership, it is then time for the program to take hold with other residents of a community.

An Idea Connections brochure states, "... we believe that the most effective way to combat the terrible legacy of racism in this country is through the medium of individual human relationships — where people come together heart to heart."

Those with B.R.I.D.G.E.S. believe the program will take hold in Euclid and hope to get the program going here very soon.

"We are going to work on it to see that it does happen (in Euclid)," said B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Director Emma Jackson. "We have taken the lead on the project."

"Our timetable is for it to start in September, but we have a lot of work to do. We're going to start really letting people know about it in a few weeks."

The program was designed with three levels of interaction between the partners.

The first level consists of the one-on-one meetings, which are expected to be held at least 16 times during a 12-month period. In past experience, some participants invited partners to their workplace or welcomed them into their family lives, even on

vacations.

Those forming a partnership volunteer for the experience. They will receive a flexible model for getting the meetings started, and materials to spur conversations of increasing intimacy over time.

The second level involves cluster group meetings. Each partnership will belong to a small cluster group, where issues are discussed in depth with full participation. Assigned coaches run the cluster groups.

Finally, there is the third level, which consists of large group meetings. All participants meet for interactive programs on various themes, two of which are "friendship" and "culture."

The Idea Connections brochure states that implementing the program will "accomplish real change in how people view and act toward one another." It also believes participation will improve the opportunity to attract new businesses, employees, clients and residents to the area.

"The key part now is to raise the funding," said Oyaski. "It's a very worthwhile venture."

"It's a cutting edge and simple idea that has had terrific results. Whether I'm mayor or not (Oyaski has announced he will not seek re-election in November), I want to continue to see this through."

"It's designed to improve working relationships and creates, among other things, a common outlook."