

South Orange/Maplewood COMMUNITY COALITION *on Race*

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"Two Towns, One Community"

Winter 2001

NEW JERSEY SECRETARY OF STATE SOARIES PRAISES WORK OF COALITION

“I am overwhelmed by your work. I am humbled by your invitation and I am honored to be with you.”

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Barbara Heisler Williams

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

That morning, thousands of our loved ones, coworkers, neighbors and friends left their homes to begin a day that would, for some, become their last, and for all, would change our lives.

For many, the immediate impulse after the attack was, "What can I do?" We lined up to give blood, offer medical care, comfort those who lost loved ones, collect emergency supplies, and try to deal with our sorrow and rage. The true test of our good impulses will come as we settle back into the routines of our changed lives.

There is no more important time for us to reach out to connect with our neighbors and to be involved in our community than now.

As Winston Churchill said, "This is no time for ease and comfort. It is the time to dare and endure."

It is clear to me that our challenge is to continue the efforts to resist hatred, and the ugly fruit it bears. Let us use the unity and energy strengthened by rage to continue to work for a more just society. Let us honor the heroes of September 11 by building a lasting monument to them, communities that stands for inclusion, wholeness and fairness.

With these words, New Jersey Secretary of State DeForest B. Soaries, Jr. opened the first event of Community Coalition Month, held October 1, 2001 in the auditorium at Columbia High School.

In a stirring speech linking the work of the Coalition to the international events sparked by the attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon only three weeks earlier, Secretary Soaries said that our "work to promote diversity is a model for New Jersey and the nation in eliminating a threat even greater than international terrorism. We must protect ourselves from the terrorism of silence, the silence that covers the boiling pot of race."

Gazing out at the audience, Soaries said, "When I was invited to speak tonight, I wanted to know what kind of people are these who take time to talk about race? I was curious. I wanted to know about what kind of people would be intentional to talk about things that have caused riots and plagued our country since its inception."

"We won't solve the racial problems in



New Jersey Secretary of State DeForest Soaries at Columbia High School.

the state or country if the first time we meet is in a crisis and the media is defining the issue," he said. "That's what you are doing here, sitting down and talking," he told the group. "That's how you solve problems. We need people like you in this country to talk about difficult things when it's not popular."

COALITION HOSTS ANNUAL MEETING

On October 30, 70 residents attended the Community Coalition's Annual Meeting, held at Morrow Memorial Church.

In prior years, this event was called the "Report to the Community." In explaining the change of title, Coalition Executive Director Barbara Heisler Williams said, "Corporate annual meetings are the principle and most direct venue for shareholders to air their concerns and discuss issues critical to company management policies and performance. Our goal at our annual meeting is not to simply report to the community about the work we do, but to engage our neighbors in discussions related

to the Coalition's mission and to encourage active participation in our programs.

Ms. Heisler Williams' opening comments were followed by Coalition Chairman Robert A. Marchman's report. Mr. Marchman reviewed the accomplishments of the Coalition during this year in the context of the work being done by its committees, noting "the hosting of forums to discuss race related issues, our work with the School District on the Diversity and Equity statement, our aggressive marketing of our communities through various media outlets, our touring of individuals interested in purchasing

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COALITION HOSTS ANNUAL MEETING *Continued from page 1*

homes in our community, our work with local realtors to promote all aspects of the community in an inclusive fashion and through our efforts to obtain outside funding to sustain our program activities.” Mr. Marchman closed by quoting a fellow trustee who said, “We must think of the community as more than the place where our home is located but, rather a place where each of us can contribute and be enriched.” He added, “The Coalition’s success resides in our ability to tap into our diversity of resources in Maplewood/South Orange. Such success evidences the benefits of an inclusive society.”

The featured speaker at the Annual Meeting was Daniel Lauber, author of *Racially Diverse Communities: A National Necessity*. Mr. Lauber is widely recognized as one of the nation’s leading experts on fair housing law for group homes and halfway houses for people with disabilities, and for his efforts to promote integrated communities. Dan formed his company, Planning/Communications in 1979 after a career as an award-winning city planner working for local and state government.

In an often witty and irreverent presentation, Mr. Lauber addressed the important elements of a pro-integrative plan.



Robert Marchman, Dan Lauber and Barbara Heisler Williams enjoy a light moment at the Coalition’s Annual Meeting.

He spoke of the need for community involvement, a broad coalition involving municipal, school and community leaders, along with political will to build a stably integrated community. Speaking of the significance of the school district’s participation, he pointed to research stating that the academic achievement gap between whites and non-whites is significantly lessened in stably integrated communities. Referring to federal and state fair housing policies, Mr. Lauber provided examples of policies originally intended to support integration, which were “watered down” and work against integration. He suggest-

ed that more needed to be done on the state and federal level to support and protect communities working to promote stable integration.

A panel discussion, featuring Maplewood Township Committee-woman Ellen Davenport, Coalition consultant Don DeMarco (president of Fund for an OPEN Society), Coalition volunteer Audrey Rowe, and South Orange Village Trustee and Coalition liaison Arthur Taylor followed. Mrs. Davenport spoke of Maplewood’s reasons for supporting the Coalition’s formation. Mr. DeMarco addressed the significance of the work of South Orange and Maplewood as a beacon for other communities to follow. In stirring remarks, Ms. Rowe spoke of building inclusive organizations to support our community, including the need to “reach out to touch, invite and include people of color” in this effort. In support of the need for the Coalition to continue its work, Mr. Taylor recounted his conversations with South Orange trustees regarding the value Coalition volunteers add to the community, “We couldn’t afford to pay for the work they’re doing.”

COMMITTEES INVITE NEW MEMBERS TO JOIN

Committee members from the Coalition’s nine standing committees staffed tables at the Committee Open House held just prior to the Annual Meeting on October 30.

Answering questions and displaying products of their work were members of the following committees:

- Financial Incentives
- Finance and Development
- Interfaith Outreach
- Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research
- Neighborhood Association and Civic Life
- Ordinance Review Committee
- Promotions & Marketing Committee
- Schools Committee
- Touring Committee.

Also joining committee members were representatives of our regional fair housing council, MUSE, and participants in the Two Town Study Circles Program. More information about any of these committees or programs can be obtained by calling 761-6116, or by visiting the Coalition website at www.twotowns.org.

FAIR HOUSING RIGHTS AND REMEDIES

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REFLECTIONS

We asked a few attendees at the October 1 forum reflect on what they "took away" that evening:

Don DeMarco: New Jersey Secretary of State DeForest Soaries said he had looked forward to seeing what the remarkable people looked like—those who come together interracially to be intentional about hard issues of race and integration. He said that he'd especially thought about his appearance in SO/M since the 9/11 horrors. The Secretary understands that interracial, interethnic, interreligious unity that arises out of crisis will be transitory and that non-crisis interracial engagement is rare and has lasting benefits. He said that what the Community Coalition is about is an antidote to the intolerance and mistrust that

divide people of one tribe from others. He had a way of putting things that called both for acknowledging differences and not seeing everything primarily through the prism of race. As fortunate as we were to hear Soaries, so was he fortunate to look into the faces in the audience and feel the process and product of our pro-integrative intentionality.

Sheila Belt: Several Social Studies teachers from Columbia HS required their students to attend the forum and write an essay about the Secretary's speech. At most of the public forums I have attended, most students in attendance due to an assignment, if not all, left early. They would explain that they had heard enough to complete the assignment.

Not this time. Most, if not all, stayed until the end of the Soaries forum. They

were upbeat; glad they had come, and looking forward to writing about what they had heard. I think that the audience, students as well as adults, believed that the Secretary was speaking about them and they liked what they heard. Although South Orange and Maplewood are positively written about in various publications, Soaries represented an "outsider" saying well done directly to the community—something the Coalition and the community need to hear more often.

Ellen Greenfield: Dr. Soaries suggested the real test of a people was how groups interacted when there were no crises. I expect the work being done through the Coalition, within our community, encourages understanding and tolerance in day-to-day life.

RUBY BRIDGES HALL ADDRESSES STUDENTS

"I can't play with you", the boy said. "My mama said not to because you're a nigger."

"At that moment, it all made sense to me. I finally realized that everything had happened because I was black. I remember feeling a little stunned. It was all about the color of my skin." The children in the Maplewood Middle School auditorium sat spellbound for nearly two hours as they listened to Ruby Bridges describe her first year of school. "These events happened to me when I was six years old, and I can only tell you about them from a child's perspective."

What followed though, was a very adult discussion of the ways hate and racism can

“When the scary subject of race is finally broached, kids want to talk and talk. It's very satisfying.”

tear apart a community. The children listened intently as Mrs. Hall talked about freedom summer, the war against integration in Louisiana and her experience as the sole black child selected to integrate an all-white elementary school. "There was this law that said that kids couldn't attend school together and there was nothing you could do. If that law hadn't changed, we wouldn't be here today."

Ruby Bridges message was clear. "No one is born with hate or knowing not to like one another," she said. "We start to grow up and someone passes hate on to us, like a disease and that's how it starts. Racism is a grown-up disease. Let's stop using kids to spread it."



SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY COALITION

Your generous gift will help the Coalition's work continue. The South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race is dedicated to preserving our two towns

as communities of choice for all, regardless of race. Please support the Community Coalition's activities by sending your gift today.

Name _____

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*Please write your check to South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race and mail it to:
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P.O. Box 1309,
Maplewood, NJ 07040.*

\$25 \$50 \$100

\$500 Other _____

COALITION AND ADULT SCHOOL KICK-OFF TWO TOWNS STUDY CIRCLES

By Margery Cohen, Study Circles Participant/Facilitator

When I heard about the program Study Circles, that uses community dialogue for community problem solving, that explores Race and Racism, I knew I would be very interested in participating. Three community organizations have fostered that interest, the Community Coalition on Race, the South Orange Maplewood Adult School and the League of Women Voters.

I found out by going to their website, studycircles.org, that Study Circles is a program used in many parts of the country that provides a simple way to carry out small group, democratic, highly participatory discussions to give everyone the opportunity to make a difference in their community. Last Spring members of the Coalition and the Adult School enrolled in a pilot project of Study Circles led by trained facilitators from the NJ Office of Bias Crime and Community Relations.

That experience was moving and enlightening. It was a diverse group, black and white, men and women, older and younger. How do we really know about how race affects us both personally and through the institutions of our society until we hear the stories that people have to tell? It is the stories that get us beneath the surface interaction with one another, that make us look deeper, and realize how different experiences mold us into who we are.



Two Town Study Circle facilitators Margery Cohen, Sheila Belt, Charlie Bibbins and Suzanne Lee compare notes as they complete training.

This is a voyage of self-discovery as well as one of finding out about others and judging the consequences of what we do or don't do to challenge racism as we know it. Study Circles provides the mechanism to make meaningful progress. The goal is for the group to devise practical actions and strategies for addressing racism and race relations.

Through the efforts of the South Orange/Maplewood Adult School and the Community Coalition on Race, two Study Circles are meeting this fall. Trained facili-

tators lead each circle and a final meeting will bring together the participants of all circles for a closing discussion. Participants were asked to commit to attending all the sessions.

New Study Circles will begin in the spring. There is no fee to register or participate. Call 761-6116 x8 for more information.

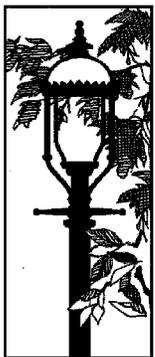
**PRE-REGISTER NOW
FOR FUTURE CIRCLES**



A NEW LOOK FOR COALITION WEBSITE

Take time to visit the Coalition's newly redesigned website. You're in for a treat. The site is more than simply visually enticing and chock full of information for those considering moving to our two towns. Recent additions provide a News and Events page, online access to the

Coalition's newsletter, an avenue for finding out more or joining a Coalition committee, and a way for community members to sign up for email notification of Coalition activities and events. Stay informed; stay involved ... with just a click of your mouse at www.twotowns.org!



South Orange/Maplewood COMMUNITY COALITION *on Race*

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