

Team Diversity

"A newsletter for and about Community Diversity Appreciation Teams"

"Noticias sobre Grupos Comunitarios Fomentando Diversidad Cultural"

Volume 5, Number 1

211 E. Maple St., Des Moines, Iowa 50309-1858

May 2000

Purpose of Team Diversity Newsletter: To recognize the work of community diversity appreciation teams in Iowa and to share information about teams and diversity-related ideas and resources.

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The Death of Charles Lamont Lovelady

When the life of a vital, 26 year old man is cut short, family and those who knew him are left to live the surreal reality of the tragedy. When that young man's race is seen by many to be tied to his untimely death, it has the effect of reopening wounds that have never healed. Considering all that has been written about that tragic event which began on February 16th, and all of the subsequent response that has been set in to motion, there are by now numerous citizens around the state who are well aware of the story. Some may even be weary of the news coverage, and wish that it would just go away.

One of the many issues that has surfaced in the aftermath, was the question of whether some establishments are discriminatory in their enforcement of dress codes. The coverage and conversations that I've been aware of demonstrate that the opinions vary widely. Some people will say they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that discrimination in the enforcement of dress codes by some establishments has been around since the hills. Others vehemently deny that there is discrimination and support the need for dress codes. Then there are others who are realizing for the first time that maybe what they've been hearing from some groups might be more than just ranting based on paranoia.

Many were outraged by the grand jury's decision to indict the bouncers in Lovelady's death on manslaughter, and expressed sentiments that once again this represented a miscarriage of justice. On the other side of the fence, those well informed as to the application of legal practice and theory asked (given the givens) what other finding could have been reached. While everyone seems to agree that for the family and community this has been the most painful of events, the conclusion of many is that Mr. Lovelady's death was not intentional. Others would argue that if Mr. Lovelady had not been African- American, he would still be alive.

Most of us have strong opinions when it comes to these types of emotionally charged issues. It's obvious that there is not a shortage of diverse perspectives and passion. But in spite of all the passion and strong opinions, in my observations there have not been significant efforts for all of the diverse factions to join together and once and for all begin serious dialogue about the central issue, race.

I once heard the mayor of Kansas City say during an eloquent speech that the civil rights movement gave us civil rights laws, but civil rights is not the same as integration. In other words, we haven't yet learned how to live together. This is the remaining challenge in the civil rights arena. I think the journey begins when we make the effort to understand the heart of each others' passions and perspectives. One method of achieving understanding can be by learning how to listen to each other through open, honest dialogue. This kind of dialogue is absolutely essential to working through our problems with race.

One vehicle that has proven to be effective is study circles. This method, sometimes referred to as "honest conversations" allows participants to share their perspectives on race in an atmosphere that is respectful, safe and non confrontational. It is not a forum for debate or where an individual person is an expert or dominates the conversation. This facilitator guided process goes beyond the typical interracial discussions on race, that have left so many of us feeling more frustrated and weary of the topic. Study circles continue to demonstrate that this method allows for true, in depth understanding of diverse perspectives on race.

Based on much that I have read and the conversations that I've had with many, I know that there are lots of people who have concerns and a great deal of passion about race relations. It is unfortunate that it takes a tragedy of this magnitude to force the issue into the light of day. But it is yet another sign that race is something that won't go away until we find ways to deal with it. My personal hope is that after we move past the tragedy of this young man's passing we will take advantage of the potential opportunities to work together toward real strides in race relations.

Resources

"Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide," a 28-page guide on community action against hate, is available from The Southern Poverty Law Center, 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery AL 36104.

What is Happening in Your Community at Clubs, Restaurants, Bars and Other Public Accommodations?

What is your town doing about dress codes, clubs, bouncer techniques and customers? Can your mayor work on it before there is a death? Can your team work on it to prevent discrimination, terrible injury or death? Can your area test certain clubs? Can you find enough volunteers to help with the testing? Is there anything that can be done?

State-wide Diversity Activity:

Tama County Team for Intercultural Community at their February 17th meeting discussed ways to assure participation, including Hispanics, in the 2000 census. A teacher at the local high school will talk to his Spanish class about designing a poster that will help alleviate some of the fears and explain the benefits of participating in the census.

Henry County Diversity Team in Mt. Pleasant will begin community wide study circles, focusing on Immigration issues. Their efforts are in response to recent negative press on immigration concerns. They are looking for ways to celebrate the historical significance of the community once known as Lee Town. This Community, like Buxton, was once a thriving African-American settlement.

North Iowa Diversity Appreciation Team sponsored a youth Forum on March 9th. This was a diversity forum, which included a warm-up activity, a panel discussion of diverse youths and small group activities.

Iowa City residents just completed a round of study circles in which two groups participated. They will hold a combined meeting to decide if they would like to move forward with community-wide study circles and brainstorm other possible types of community action around related diversity issues. Members will participate in a rally in West Branch on March 23rd as a response to a recent hate crime in that community.

Muscatine West Middle School is holding their Fourth Annual "Calling All Colors," which is a half day celebration of diversity. This celebration includes guest speakers, diversity workshops for students and recognition of those in the community and around the state who have made significant contributions in the area of diversity. The celebration will be on April 6th. For additional information contact Susan Johansen at 1-319-263-0411.

Cedar Valley Diversity Appreciation Team is holding a banquet on April 6th in order to celebrate the completion of another successful round of community wide study circles on race and race relations. This community continues to be one of the most active with respect to participation in study circles. March 17-19 an African American Women's conference was held at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Waterloo. The YWCA's 3rd annual Diversity Conference will be held on April 27th at the Waterloo Center for the Arts. "Crossing Bridges to Understanding" will focus on empowering Youth to take a stand against racism, as well as learn how to deal with racism in the work place. For more information call 1-319-234-7589.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission

211 East Maple Street

Des Moines, Iowa 50309-1858

"Our mission is to eliminate discrimination in Iowa."

www.state.ia.us/government/crc

Grants Available From Study Circle Fund

The Study Circles Fund, established in 1999 by the Topsfield Foundation, supports the work of the Study Circles Resource Center by providing money to communities that are building Study Circles programs. Resources for the fund come from national foundations that share a commitment to support the work of increasing citizen involvement in community building.

The Study Circles Fund awards grants twice a year. To apply for a grant or to get more information please contact the Study Circles Fund, 264 N. Pleasant Street, 2nd Floor, Amherst, MA 01002; or, call 1-413-256-0349, ext. 13; or, mgage@fund.com.

Waterloo's Cedar Valley Diversity Team Has Zero Tolerance for Hate Messages

Members of the Cedar Valley Diversity Appreciation Team will not tolerate messages of hate. Reverend John Ford, who is one of the supporters at the rally said, "We won't tolerate this kind of thing in our city." Kathy Mahoney, chairperson of the team's Hate Crimes Committee stated the team members want to collectively express sorrow about the occurrence of hate messages on property. Such acts emphasize the need for a strong, active coalition that can respond appropriately to bigotry and send a clear message to perpetrators that hate crimes and prejudice are totally unacceptable.

A swastika had been painted recently on a garage. It loomed behind Mahoney as she addressed a score of supporters, reporters and interested residents during a conference called to respond to a February 14th vandalism spree. The swastika, "KKK" and other offensive words were painted on garages, signs and other property along an unnamed access road near the 500 blocks of Cutler and Reed streets.

Reverend J. R. Burt, Sr., who is a team member who lives in the area struck by vandals, used the occasion to call for unity. Walter Reed, Jr., Director of the Waterloo Human Rights Commission, said his commission has discussed assisting owners of the vandalized property repaint. Some of the graffiti had already been removed. Symbols on a railroad signal box on Logan Avenue were painted over, and a racial slur and a swastika were wiped off a garage and the tailgate of a truck.

Perpetrators are believed to be children since smaller footprints were found in the snow. Police Chief Berbal Koehrsen said, "It is particularly disturbing when a child is propagating hate." Police are not investigating the incident as a hate crime because the vandalism was random and did not target specific people.

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