

Public Forums: Foreclosure -- Moving From Fear to Positive Action

This important series of public forums was born from the commissioners' past training as conflict mediators and our strong belief in conflict mediation as a valuable tool to resolve differences and settle disputes.

In this venture, the UCHRC and the Union County Foreclosure Task Force, which was created by the county's Board of Chosen Freeholders, have partnered with the New Jersey Public Defender's Office of Dispute Settlement and the Union County Superior Court's Civil Division. The workshops, titled "Foreclosure: Moving from Fear to Positive Action," are an educational presentation for fearful and distressed homeowners.

Expert panelists from state and county agencies explain the foreclosure process and provide an overview of the free resources available to them. The New Jersey Office of Consumer Affairs is also a vital participant, warning these homeowners not to fall for scams. Forums were originally presented in Westfield, Elizabeth (in Spanish), Plainfield, Rahway, and Roselle. In the past two years, we have also presented the Forum in Hillside, Linden, Plainfield, Rahway, Roselle Park, Union, and in Elizabeth, this time in both English and Spanish.

Additional 2016 Forums are being planned in partnership with our **Inter-Faith Community Network**, which is comprised of multi-denominational houses of worship geographically spread throughout Union County. We look to them to assist with community outreach and education efforts that ultimately focus on prejudice reduction and multi-cultural diversity, and as "safe havens" in time of crisis, when the community needs to come together to share, grieve, and, when needed, seek resolution.

Unity Achievement Awards

Albert Schweitzer once said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." The commissioners who volunteer their time and energies to serve on the Union County Human Relations Commission unequivocally agree that one of the best ways we can strive toward this aim is by publicly honoring those who already do it well. The UCHRC's annual Unity Achievement Awards honor individuals and organizations that have contributed in an extraordinary manner to promote respect for human rights, human dignity, and cultural diversity throughout Union County.

Spring 2016 marks our 15th annual Unity Award Presentation. Year after year, the inspirational event embraces the best that we, individually and collectively, give of ourselves on behalf of others, and touches the spirits of our award recipients, their guests, and the commissioners. We gratefully acknowledge the support of AGL Resources/Elizabethtown Gas Company for graciously permitting the use of their atrium for our reception and ceremonies, and to the Union County Prosecutor's Office for its continued support and funding.

Our 2016 and 2015 UCHRC Unity Achievement Award recipients are, respectively:

Corporation/Business Enterprise: 2016 Gina Pachkowski / Alluem Yoga. 2015 Pinho's Bakery / Raul and Julia Pinho

Nonprofit Organization: 2016 The Paul Jackson Fund. 2015 Roots and Wings

Individual: 2016 Union County Spectrum All Stars / Lori Gonzalez and Joann Fruciano. 2015 Maureen O'Brien, Esq.

Student: 2016 Griffin Spielman, Governor Livingston High School. 2015 Benedictine Academy Cor Defenders.

Educator: 2016 Dr. Theodore Schlosberg, New Jersey Workshop for The Arts. 2015 Zende Clark, Hillside Board of Education (ret.)

Media: 2016 Utterly Global LLC / Lorrie Sanchez and Carol Blank.

Law Enforcement: 2016 Sergeant Russell Gottlick, Plainfield Police Division. 2015 Auxiliary Chief Alexander Fitzgerald Parker, Rahway Police Department

Public Service: 2016 Nancy Bates. 2015 Elizabeth Hulse, Dispute Resolution Specialist, New Jersey Office of Dispute Settlement and Sandra Thaler-Gerber, Esq., Civil Division Manager, Union County Superior Court / Elizabeth.

The Clergy: 2016 Reverend Elizabeth Alexander. 2015 Reverend Jeremy Montgomery.

Faith-Based Organization: 2016 Community Access Unlimited's Union County Interfaith Coordinating Committee Council.

Veteran/Military: 2016 Colonel Edward Chrystal. 2015 James Grover, Dominick DeJohn, and Angelo Monaco.

Special Achievement Awards: 2016 Charles Newman, Union County Office for the Disabled (ret.); Jim McKeon / Broken Hearts Memorial; Captain Ralph Gregson (ret.) / Cranford Auxiliary Police Department; Police Officer Gerald McDermott / Summit Police Department; Andrew Ertman and Detective Paul Pasternak / Elizabeth Police Department. 2015 Miguel Garcia, Carlos Cancel and Hayley Zimmermann.

Commissioners

Co-Chair: Sergeant Leonard Guarino, Elizabeth Police Department (ret).

Co-Chair: Mark Spivey, Union County Prosecutor's Office

Recording Secretary: Karen E. Positan, Union County Prosecutor's Office

Commissioners:

(Boldfaced Italics indicate former Co-Chairs)

Lorraine Aklonis..... Lieutenant Keith Aslin, Linden Police Department (ret.)..... Barbara Boyer..... **Rev. Alfred E. Brown**.....

Detective Andrew Dellaquila, Union County Prosecutor's Office Bias Unit..... **Faheemah El-Amin**..... Flor Gonzalez.....

Jo Ann Hamilton..... **Acting First Assistant Prosecutor Thomas K. Isenhour**..... Chief Brian Mahoney, Scotch Plains Police Dept. (ret.).....

Lieutenant Dean Marcantonio, Union County Prosecutor's Office Bias Unit..... Ana Martinez..... **Peter McTiernan**.....

Nora Mislán..... **Charles Newman**..... Constance Perkins..... Virginia San Pedro..... Esmeralda Vargas..... Emma Villegas.....

Linda Weissbrod..... Detective Afstratios (Steve) Zevlikaris, Linden Police Department

Commissioners On Leave: Dr. Aristo Carranza, Dr. Carmen Centuolo, Dr. Martin Dickerson, Peter Jacob, **Helene Scheuer**

Commissioners Emeritus: James F. Keefe, Esq. Raul Pinto; **Jack Weinshanker**

Union County Human Relations Commission

Biannual Report May 2014 to May 2016

c/o The Office of the Union County Prosecutor

Andrew K. Ruotolo Justice Center

32 Rahway Avenue, Elizabeth, New Jersey 07202

♦ www.ucnj.org/uchrc ♦ 908.889.9028 ♦ FAX: 908.889.9653

Union County Human Relations Commission

Our mission is to actively encourage, develop, promote and strengthen respect for human rights and cultural diversity among the people of Union County.

May 1, 2016

The Honorable Grace H. Park, Acting Union County Prosecutor
Union County Prosecutor's Office
32 Rahway Avenue
Elizabeth, New Jersey 07202

Dear Prosecutor Park:

The purpose of this brief report is to provide you with an overview of some of the recent showcase initiatives of the Union County Human Relations Commission, and to thank you and the Union County Prosecutor's Office for your support and participation. Without that, none of what we do would be possible.

To paraphrase the words of Mother Theresa:

**"We alone cannot change the world,
but we can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."**

In a phrase, that is the focus and the power of the UCHRC and our current programs.

We are working to create a paradigm shift in how young people perceive themselves and others with relation to stereotypes, bias, and prejudice so we can stop the cycle of hate and violence.

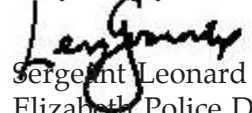
As we also help youth to better understand and positively regard law enforcement, we hope to influence them to seek out the assistance of officers when they need help, or when someone else does.


With the assistance of Union County's houses of worship, we seek to provide both a safe haven in times of crisis and a venue to provide educational forums. These forums range from exploring grassroots initiatives intended to guide our County's citizens — especially our at-risk youth — toward a better today and a brighter tomorrow.

Building upon our focus on conflict mediation, we have continued to offer our educational forums to provide a moment of respite to distressed homeowners — many of them parents of young children — encouraging them both to avoid the pitfalls of foreclosure scams and to seek free county and state resources to find a sure way to set their feet upon solid ground once again.

We look forward to our continued partnership to positively impact the lives of Union County's citizens, with an eye toward improving relationships among our culturally diverse communities; reducing, removing, or neutralizing the perceptions and barriers that result in isolationism, disharmony, violence, and tragedy; and strengthening the Union County Human Relations Commission and its focused efforts in that regard.

Very truly yours,


Sergeant Leonard Guarino
Elizabeth Police Department (ret.)
Co-Chair


Mark Spivey
Union County Prosecutor's Office
Co-Chair

LG/MS:kep

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Sergeant Leonard Guarino, Elizabeth Police Department (ret.) and Mark Spivey, Union County Prosecutor's Office

Recording Secretary:

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Please send all correspondence to the UCHRC c/o The Office of the Union County Prosecutor; Andrew K. Ruotolo Justice Center; 32 Rahway Avenue; Elizabeth, New Jersey 07202

Showcase Initiatives Focus On Youth

Police & Teens Together (PATT) Program

This program yields such important benefits to everyone involved that the Commission has decided to spread the word to law enforcement agencies statewide. In the four sessions, youth talk about their experiences with law enforcement officers and share their perspectives; the officers introduce themselves as people and as professionals; and the students and officers reverse roles in the "trading places" motor vehicle stop simulations, all with a goal of opening communication and building a bridge to increase understanding and mutual respect.

The ripples are felt as these high-school students speak positively about their experiences, insights and lessons learned with their peers, parents, and siblings. Post-survey comments indicate that the students have a better understanding of and greater respect for the roles and responsibilities of a police officer, hopefully ensuring their cooperation and that of whomever they are with during future encounters with officers, whether at school, in the community, or on the road. With an eye toward rolling the program out statewide and nationwide, a "Train the Trainers" workshop targeting community policing officers was initiated two years ago and continues to be offered on a regular basis. It was also a featured presentation at the Juvenile Officer's Annual Conference in 2015.

"Pass The Message On"

For the past five years, Linden High School social studies teacher Monica Goncalves has selected her history class upperclassmen to participate in a pilot program aimed at achieving a reduction in prejudice, bias, and hate, and the resulting violence they create.

The first four sessions of the program engage the students in an educational presentation and dialogue about the history of bias and hate, and the emotional and sociological impact that stereotypes, bias, prejudice, and hate play in our society, schools, and personal lives. A creative writing assignment allows the students to anonymously share their past experiences involving bias and prejudice situations in which they participated or witnessed that have somehow affected their lives. Each year, many of these students have given us written permission to share their stories. During the program, the upperclassmen have internalized these teachings and have taken them to heart, preparing them for the primary focus of the program: To have these students "Pass the Message On" to younger students, who more readily open up and speak and listen to them than to adults, and are more apt to heed and act upon these teachings. The upperclassmen first present an assembly program through which they show some powerful videos and share some of the writings that capture the attention of their peers and younger students.

They continue in a classroom setting to role-play and dialogue. The program is presented by Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust of Spectrum Diversity LLC, a diversity educator, UCHRC Commissioners Lt. Keith Aslin (ret.) and Officer Afstratios "Steve" Zevlikaris of the Linden Police Department, and Commissioner Karen Positan. The 2014 addition of the school's Drama Department to act out the role plays added another exciting and memorable dimension and expanded the ripples.

Bullying and Violence Prevention Initiative

The UCHRC is proud of its history in exploring and addressing bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, and intimidation early on, before these became common buzzwords and the focus of educators and state legislation. We continue to look for opportunities to educate law enforcement officers and educators on these antisocial behaviors, which often are bias-based. In addition to other special presentations we have offered, we also have offered our three-part Cyber-Safety "Train the Trainers" for educators and law enforcement officers. The Commission also is exploring other public forums that could assist the community in better understanding LGBT issues.

Community Outreach

Public Forum: Special Bias Sensitivity Training

Our esteemed partner, Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust of Spectrum Diversity LLC, presented a well-attended special bias sensitivity Training specially geared toward educators, social service providers, school resource officers, and municipal bias officers. Titled "Bullying, Bias, and Racial Disparities in Discipline," the workshop highlighted the critical importance of proactive efforts to address various forms of bias as part of comprehensive anti-bullying programming, promoting equity in education, and complying with laws such as the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights, the New Jersey Law against Discrimination, and Title IX. It also explored what we have learned about creating safe and equitable school climates now that we are five years out from the passage of New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights.

One lesson learned is that each form of bias/diversity (ethnic, religious, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, etc.) poses unique challenges in the school environment. The workshop was presented in partnership with the Union County Prosecutor's Office and Union County Superintendent of Schools.