

the critical role of bias in defining and addressing bullying, and how we can ensure that the positive school climate we are trying to create is positive for all students. Chair Barbara Boyer shared that evening that “we all need to understand how different entities define bullying, and, more importantly, how to help youth and families prevent and cope with bullying and bias.”

### Public Forums: Gang Awareness

The commissioners believe that it will take each of us and all of us to do the best we can to stem the tide of hatred and violence in our world. Acknowledging the presence and impact the gang culture has in our communities, the commission presented a series of Gang Awareness Public Forums attended by a cross-section of the community to come together at a grass-roots level to discuss and share ways that we can individually and collectively address these issues and work with youth to encourage healthy choices, relationships and affiliations. Attendees at the four forums, held from November 2011 to September 2012, included the clergy, educators, social agency and community organization staff members, law enforcement professionals, youth advocates, concerned citizens, parents, professionals, and yes, even some admitted gang members. Formal and informal presenters and the audience engaged in a healthy dialogue to explore the best practices to develop and fund gang-prevention measures and outreach. We are grateful to the many citizens within Union County and the surrounding counties who have taken the time to participate and to take a stand to influence our youth’s direction toward a brighter future while making our homes, schools and community a better and safer place to live and work. One of the program’s ripples involved Elizabeth students who attend the Hillcrest Academy. They set out to create a community center in Elizabeth to provide youth with a safe and healthy place to meet, learn, and socialize, keeping them off the streets and distracting their attention from gangs, drugs, and violence.

### Public Forums: FORECLOSURE: Moving From FEAR to POSITIVE ACTION

This magnificent 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. Entitled “Foreclosure: Moving from Fear To Positive Action,” the educational presentation for fearful and distressed homeowners explores the foreclosure process and provides an overview of the free state and county resources available to them. The New Jersey Office of Consumer Affairs is also a vital participant, warning these homeowners not to fall for any scams. Forums have been presented in Westfield, Elizabeth (in Spanish), Plainfield, Rahway, and Roselle. Spring 2014 presentations are planned for Linden, Union, and Hillside.

### Unity Achievement Awards

Albert Schweitzer once said, “**Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.**” In full agreement, the commissioners who volunteer their time and energies to serve on the Union County Human Relations Commission unequivocally agree that one of our most important opportunities is to publicly honor those who already do that 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 2014 marks our 13th 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 2013 and 2014 UCHRC Unity Achievement Award recipients are, respectively: *Corporate/Business Enterprise:* Plainfield Dairy Queen/Richard and Donna Albanese-Demair and Yo Delight (Springfield). *Community Organization:* The Elizabeth Coalition to House The Homeless and Young Men of Resilience (Plainfield)/Sarah Cherry-Cadogan, President and Founder. *Non-Profit Organization:* Cherished Creations and The Birthday Box/Stacy Bergerman & Jennifer Wilner. *Individual:* Karen Hall and Lisa Petrillo. *Law Enforcement:* Sgt. Marianne Hopko and Sgt. Nancy Zimmerman, (Ret.) Union County Sheriff’s Office (Tree of Hope) and Detective Afstratios Steve Zevlikaris, Linden Police Department. *Public Service:* Union County Medical Reserve Corps and Ralph Bernardo (Clark). *Student:* Marc Avena, Arthur L. Johnson High School, Clark and Dulce Cabezas, Linden High School. *Educator:* Monica Goncalves, Teacher, Linden High School and Dr. Danny Robertozzi, E.D.D., Linden Superintendent of Schools. *Media:* Bernice Paglia. *Clergy:* Rev. Princeton H. Holt. *Veteran:* First Sgt. Michael Philibert, Linden High School and Joseph Barbella (Union). *Special Achievement Awards:* Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust, Spectrum Diversity LLC and Dr. Carmen Centuolo-Musial; Officer Larry Brown, Jr., Plainfield Police Division and James F. Keefe, Esq.

### Commissioners

**Co-Chair:** Barbara Boyer

**Co-Chair:** First Assistant Prosecutor Thomas K. Isenhour  
**Recording Secretary:** Karen E. Positan, Union County Prosecutor’s Office

**Commissioners:** *(Italics indicate former Co-Chairs)*

Lorraine Aklonis; Lt. Keith Aslin, Linden Police Department; Rev. Alfred E. Brown; Dr. Carmen Centuolo; Det. Rudolfo Correia, Union County Prosecutor’s Office Bias Unit; Dr. Martin Dickerson; *Faheemah El-Amin*; Magdalena Fleszar; Flor Gonzales; Sgt. Lenny Guarino, Elizabeth Police Department; Jo Ann Hamilton; Alice Holzapfel; Chief Brian Mahoney, Scotch Plains Police Department; Lt. Dean Marcantonio, Union County Prosecutor’s Office Bias Unit; Ana Martinez; *Peter McTiernan*; Nora Mislan; *Charles Newman*; Virginia San Pedro; Helene Scheuer; Deborah Smith; Mark Spivey, Union County Prosecutor’s Office; Esmeralda Vargas; Emma Villegas; Linda Weissbrod.  
*Commissioners Emeritus:* Raul Pinto; Jack Weinshanker

# Union County Human Relations Commission

## Biannual Report May 2012 to May 2014

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](http://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, 2014

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.

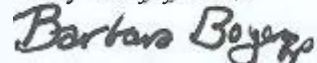
As we also help youth to better understand and positively regard law enforcement, we hope to influence them to seek out the assistance of officers when they need help, or when someone else does.

With the assistance of Union County's houses of worship, we seek to provide both a safe haven in times of crisis and an educational forum to explore grass roots initiatives intended to guide our youth, especially our at-risk-youth, toward a better today and a brighter tomorrow.

We have expanded our conflict mediation focus to guide distressed homeowners -- many of them with children -- to avoid the pitfalls of foreclosure scams, and to seek free county and state resources to find a way out (and 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 and reducing, removing, or neutralizing the perceptions and barriers that result in isolationism, disharmony, violence and tragedy, and to strengthen the Union County Human Relations Commission and its efforts in that regard.

Very truly yours,



Barbara Boyer  
Co-Chair



First Assistant Prosecutor Thomas K. Isenhour  
Co-Chair

BB/TKI:kep

## Co-Chairs:

Barbara Boyer  
and  
First Assistant  
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# Showcase Initiatives Focus On Youth

## Police & Teens Together (PATT) Program

This interactive four-session program has traveled countywide since it was piloted at Elizabeth High School in 2000, and it continues to be a hit wherever it is presented. While the initial outreach to more than 1,200 students has been the primary focus, 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.

Session 1: Youth Perspectives on Law Enforcement  
(Sharing Past Experiences)

Session 2: Officers as People, and As Professionals

Session 3: Trading Places Role Plays

Session 4: Building Bridges/Communication,  
and Mutual Respect

## "Pass The Message On"

For the past four years, Linden High School social studies teacher Monica Goncalves has selected her history class upperclassmen to participate in a pilot program to target 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. The students then are given a creative writing assignment in order to allow them to share, anonymously, situations involving bias and prejudice in which they have been involved either as a participant or a witness and that have impacted or affected their lives. In the four years we have piloted and perfected this program, many of these students have given us written permission

# Community Outreach

The Union County Human Relations Commission's (UCHRC) **INTER-FAITH COMMUNITY NETWORK** is comprised of multi-denominational houses of worship geographically spread throughout Union County. We look to them to assist with community outreach and education that ultimately focus on prejudice reduction and multi-cultural diversity, as well as to serve as "safe havens" in time of crisis where the community can come together to share, grieve and, when needed, seek resolution.

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 share some of the writings that capture the attention of their peers and the younger students and show some powerful videos. Afterwards, they meet with these students in a classroom setting to role-play and continue the dialogue. The program is presented by Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust of Spectrum Diversity LLC, a diversity educator, Commissioner/Lt. Keith Aslin of the Linden Police Department, and UCHRC Commissioner Karen Positan. In 2014, the addition of the school's Drama Department to act out the role plays will add another dimension and expand 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 anti-social behaviors, which oftentimes are bias-based. Schools and other organizations in the community continue to reach out to us for presenters to reach their students, parents and teachers. In addition to other special presentations we have offered, we continue to offer our 3-Part Cyber-Safety Train the Trainers for Educators and Law Enforcement Officers on an ongoing basis.

## 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, especially geared toward parents, educators, and social service providers, which was held on Thursday, April 6 at Baxel Hall on the Union County Vo-Tech High School campus. This educational presentation addressed