

Human Rights Commission
Minutes, October 20, 2004

Member Attendees: Nancy Clark, Susan Wagner, Liliana Silvestry, Valentina G, Gabe Garcia, Stephanie Haedt, John Hagen, Jeanne Poppe.

Others: Tricia Wiechmann, city liaison, Donna Nybo, Dan Kane.

Donna Nybo was present to be recognized by the HRC for her artwork which became the large banner for the Ethnic Festival. A photo was taken of her with the artwork in the library where it will be temporarily be displayed. She spoke of her artwork and the passion she had behind making the large banner. In every letter of the banner there is a face and she handcut each of the letters. She used many National Geographic magazines and tried to illustrate as many different life situations as possible (happy and sad times, young and old, etc). For example, from Alaska she had 2 whale researchers, from Wisconsin a sunflower farmer. Catherine Churchill a student of hers was the model for the hands around the globe. Donna expressed what a thrill it was for her to win this recognition and she is very pleased to have been a part of it.

Meeting was officially called to order at 6:27 pm. Minutes stood approved as read. Matt Merritt of the Austin Daily Herald has indicated it will be okay for the HRC to submit a newspaper column. Susan wrote the first article as an introduction of what the HRC is about. We talked about future articles including ones on housing that Stephanie will do. We also want to dispel the myths that seem to have prevailed throughout the fall local political season. In doing this we talked about hosting a community wide meeting but not just by having the “experts” and prominent figures in the community talk at people, but rather allowing for an exchange of dialogue and information sharing. Liliana expressed that she has factual data from the McKnight Foundation about immigrants and refugees that would be useful to share.

We also talked about our calendar of events, including the newspaper articles. In October we have the introduction. November can be housing, December – dispel myths, then in January we could be ready to host a community meeting on the subject. We would want to have ground rules and a facilitator who could keep things under control. We could have it at the Paramount Theatre or at the senior center. We can also be sure any of our articles are also posted on the city web site. Perhaps we can also do something to get our town meeting televised. Others to include in the meeting would be faith community (ministerial association), Hormel corporation reps, George Dahl – people who will raise the questions. Liliana can provide stats and Chief Phillip and Dr. Candace Raskin can also provide the data and facts that speak to crime and school related information. A subcommittee could gather and discuss the possibilities of this.

Stephanie is working on the housing article for the November submission. She will need to beef it up a little more if there is to be only one article on the topic. She will ask that people review it via email and she can submit it by Mid November. Tricia will make sure it gets put on the city website. The December article will be about facts to tear down the negative campaign that seems to be going on regarding our changing community. The subcommittee for this December article will be: Gabe, Stephanie and Nancy with Tricia serving in liaison capacity. We will also want to consider dates for the town meeting by looking at school, city, college, chamber, arts calendars to determine when is a good date.

Videos: There will be a subcommittee to review the videos. Stephanie can get them from the Rochester Public Library and Gabe, John and Valentina will view them to see if there are any we want to show in Austin.

Upcoming Calendar of events:

Monday, January 17, 2005

MLK, Jr. march and program

Christ Episcopal Church will be asked if they want to host the program and lunch

Subcommittee for this event will be: Liliana, John, Jeanne

Subcommittee for the essay contest which will happen in late winter will be John and Susan.

In April we likely will want to show a video and have discussion around it. Anything we want to do we could talk to Shawn Martin of Q-TV to try to market the events. Perhaps he can work with us to prepare Public Service Announcements.

Time was spent discussing the presentation by Gary Gorman of the State Dept for Human Rights who spoke to AL and Austin HRC members. The next meeting for the regional group likely will be in Owatonna in January.

Citizens addressing the meeting. Dan Kane said he had deep concerns about the MN coalition for immigration that is cropping up in southern MN. He distributed information about the death of a Muslim that was given him at the League of MN HR conference in early October. He stated a concern about the fostering of anger against everyone who isn't an "Austinite". He would like to see us mount an honest and factual campaign so people can have a place to register concerns and be heard. He suggested the leaders of the community need to lead the charge on this and that includes doctors from the hospital, school personnel, corporate leaders, etc.

Our next meeting will be on November 17 at 6 pm in the Austin public library.