

2017 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE KIRKWOOD HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Revised February 23, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kirkwood Human Rights Commission (KHRC) worked to increase its levels of action and community involvement significantly in 2017. Our strong presence at the Greentree festival was an indication of the direction of our work, as were our art contest for middle school students and our essay contest for high school juniors. The City of Kirkwood administration, Eliot Unitarian Chapel, and more than 16 major community organizations committed to serving people challenged physically or cognitively partnered with us to make our 2017 Abilities Symposium successful.

Community leaders from Kirkwood Schools, the Missouri Commission on Human Rights, the Kirkwood Police Department, and other social justice organizations shared their experience and expertise with us at our regular meetings. Commissioners, in turn, took active roles in many community organizations, such as the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association and Bridges to Racial Understanding.

EDUCATION

The Commission is deeply committed to serving as a resource and as an active partner in helping the Kirkwood School District achieve its goals in eliminating the achievement gap and in insuring equal treatment for all students in the disciplinary process.

Robinson School principal Jennifer Sisul spoke to us about the progress of the Equity Walks program, in which laypeople from Kirkwood were asked to walk through the schools to assess their openness to and reflection of their diverse student populations. Special attention was paid to inclusive images and atmosphere and accessibility for disabled people. Thirty five percent of

the individuals trained to participate in the equity walks were non-Caucasian and there were 16 to 19 visits per school. Five members of the KHRC were among the “walkers.”

Rev. Jeff Moore spoke to the KHRC about and distributed a copy of the strategic plan for Kirkwood Area Every Child Promise, a community effort regarding early childhood education. Their goal is to foster quality early childhood experiences for all children and families by providing supportive partnerships and financial resources.

Interim Superintendent of Schools Michele Condon presented a detailed report on the Task Force to Eliminate the Achievement Gap in our schools. She provided commissioners with copies of the action plans the Task Force has developed. The KHRC assured Ms. Condon of our willingness to support these initiatives and to become actively involved in the work where our presence would be helpful.

Chairman Denis Hart and Commissioner Judy Moticka met with Kirkwood High School principal Mike Havener and arranged to receive quarterly updates on social justice issues initiated by the school. Commissioners also indicated that KHRC is eager to support the activities of the KHS social justice club. The faculty sponsor of the club will be invited to speak to the KHRC in the future.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

In January, Kirkwood Police Chief Jack Plummer attended the KHRC meeting and spoke on a possible reporting process that had been presented by the Kirkwood Policing Committee/Eliot Unitarian Chapel and the KHRC. He requested that commission members forward any questions and/or comments they may have to Denis Hart.

Chief Plummer attended the May meeting to present the KPD’s first quarterly report to the HRC. He reported that there were four written complaints in the first quarter, of which two

were unfounded, one resulted in exoneration of the officer, and one was still pending. Department demographics and diversity/de-escalation training were addressed. Chief Plummer reported that body cameras are now being used by all officers, and the department is following state statutes regarding storage of the devices and the recorded data. Chair Denis Hart and Commissioner Ron Hodges and Jill Johnson also met with the new Police Chief Brian Murphy to reinforce their commitment to provide a Quarterly Police Report to the KHRC. The Report now addresses the following: Department Demographics, Complaints both written and oral, Training now under the new 2017 Continuing Law Enforcement Education (CELL) requirements. The training includes, Officer Well-Being, Fair and Impartial policing plus implicant bias recognition, Handling Persons with mental health & cognitive impairment, Tactical de-escalation and crisis management, Racial Profiling among others, and Vehicle Stop Reports.

Officer Gary Baldrige, Community Services Officer for the Kirkwood Police Department, attended the June meeting to introduce himself. Officer Baldrige will be available to attend KHRC meetings.

At the end of the year, the KHRC was attempting to put into place an on-line reporting system that would allow citizens who felt they had been mistreated by the police or the city to contact the Commission directly, without being intimidated by having to use the city's email address to reach us. We have also taken steps to make sure that Caretaker Alert Forms are available to the public and requested they be made available at the three firehouses in the city as well as in other easily accessible public venues.

INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY

Both as a group and individually, members of the KHRC continued their active involvement in local and regional organizations which share our focus on human rights.

Commissioner Morris Fletcher led the project of setting up and staffing a KHRC booth at the 2017 Greentree Festival. Members of the KHRC passed out educational material about the commission and human rights issues in general along with treats for young people and premiums for the adults. Public response to our presence was enthusiastic, and the booth was busy throughout the Festival.

Alisa Warren, Executive Director of the Missouri Commission on Human Rights, spoke to the Commission at the April meeting, presenting information on the scope of services provided by her organization and the steps to expect when a complaint is filed with them. Nina Balsam, from the MCHR, spoke on the issue of nuisance ordinances and their effect on domestic violence victims and their families. It was noted that Senate Bill 43, which has subsequently become law, would make it much more difficult for victims of discrimination to bring their concerns to a fair hearing.

The KHRC considered the biographies of four nominees before awarding the 2017 KHRC Award to Harriet Patton, leader of the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association. Mrs. Patton was highly recommended by several people, including Commissioner William Winter, who has worked closely with her in support of Meacham Park projects and activities. The award plaque was presented to Mrs. Patton at a City Council Meeting.

Chair Denis Hart attended the 2017 Missouri Human Rights Conference in Columbia on November 2. Other members of the commission were involved in 2017 with a wide variety of organizations focused on social justice and equal rights for all people.

INVOLVEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The 2017 Essay Contest was planned and carried out. There were 105 entries from Kirkwood High School and St. John Vianney School. The winners were: 1st place – Catherine Skubiz and Osman Noueiry (tie); 2nd place – Callie Mechelke; and 3rd place – Taylor Anderson. The first

and second place winners have been invited to read their essays at the 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King Day event at Kirkwood High School. At the December meeting, the KHRC chose the topic for the 2018 essay contest. The 2018 topic is “How much progress do you think has been made with race relations in Kirkwood, and what still needs to be done?”

The 2017 Art Fair for students in Grade 6 was conducted, with the help of teachers from Nipher and North Middle Schools, and with the cooperation and assistance of the Kirkwood Public Library. The theme is “The Beauty of Diversity and Inclusion in Kirkwood.”

2017 ABILITIES SYMPOSIUM

In compliance with the requirement that the KHRC present an annual symposium on human rights issues, and in cooperation with the existing Subcommittee on Disability, KHRC presented the “2017 Kirkwood Abilities Symposium” at Eliot Unitarian Chapel on October 28th. The event was free and open to the public. The focus of the symposium was the 2015-16 Survey on Disabilities conducted by the KHRC with the help of other organizations such as St. Louis Arc and Paraquad. The Symposium asked for the status of the four recommendations from the Disabilities Survey made to the City Council in June 2016 regarding: Transportation/Movement, Employment, Housing, and Support Services. The event included presenters from 16 local and regional organizations focused on the issues faced by people with physical and cognitive challenges as well as Kirkwood Chief Administrative Officer Russ Hawes. Active involvement by members of the Commission as well as members of the Subcommittee insured that the venue was set up, tech support was available, and food for breakfast and lunch was available.

The KHRC regards this event as a success, but even more important as learning experience that will enable us to plan and organize the 2018 symposium much more efficiently.

PENDING PROJECTS

The KHRC held a special meeting in November to review the terms and conditions under which the group was created and to be sure that we are complying with both the letter and the spirit of all relevant instructions. We addressed some inconsistencies among documents and will have a special meeting in January to continue our refinement of our Strategic Plan.

We will have a table at the 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King Day celebration at Kirkwood High to increase our visibility and to provide information to the public.

Robert Boyd, Vice Chair

Morris Fletcher

Denis Hart, Chair

Ronald Hodges

Jill Johnson

Josh Lewis

Judy Moticka

Amanda Sher, Secretary

William Winter