

Kirkwood Human Rights Commission

Annual Report

2016

1. The membership of the commission has undergone several changes during the year. Jill Johnson joined us in the first quarter, and Chair Darnell Frost reached the end of his final term, and was replaced by Judy Moticka. New officers were chosen during the Summer. They are:

Chair: Denis Hart

Vice-chair: Robert Boyd

Secretary: Amanda Sher

At the end of the year, membership was at the statutory level of nine.

2. The commission has devoted considerable effort to fulfilling our obligation to engage with other community organizations to advance the status of civil rights in Kirkwood. Our work has resulted in the formation of important alliances and in the development of tools and procedures for addressing specific issues faced by persons of color, including students; by persons with disabilities; and by those in the LGBTQ community.

A. Over the course of the year, the Commission has worked with Chief

Plummer to develop specific statistical tools to help measure the degree to which the Kirkwood Police Department follows its stated policy of avoiding racial discrimination in interactions with the public. Chair Denis Hart and Commissioner Ron Hodges have met with Chief Plummer and set out a working format for a quarterly HRC police report covering the demographics of the police force, diversity and de-escalation training, complaints of discrimination, and statistics on the demographic distribution of traffic stops, searches and arrests. The commission especially urges the KPD to develop and implement a procedure for logging and tracking verbal complaints.

B. The Commission has been interested in the activities of Eliot Unitarian Chapel and the Rev. Barbara Gadon in pursuing racial justice and in the formation of a Kirkwood policing committee. The commission acknowledges that our goals are similar. In December, Rev. Gadon and the Kirkwood Policing Committee made a detailed presentation to the Commission on their activities and areas of concern. The commission agrees that their efforts to develop clear policies for the use of body cameras and for handling of all complaints by the police are of key importance, as is the training of School Resource Officers. We have agreed to collaborate in these efforts.

C. Darnel Frost, Chair of the School Board, and Assistant Superintendent Bryan Painter gave a presentation at the October meeting regarding the

existing achievement gap between white and minority students and concrete ways in which that gap is being addressed. The HRC was specifically given an invitation, which was subsequently approved, to take part in planned “equity walks” through the various school properties. After suitable training in January, 2017, commissioners and members of the public will walk through all ten school properties, looking for instances of discrimination and for ways to bring forward positive public images of minorities and minority students. Further joint efforts with the school district include contacts with Dr. Havener, principal of Kirkwood High School, about some of the concerns raised by students in the essays submitted for the 2016 contest. Having read the essays himself, Dr. Havener and his staff were aware of the issues, including lunch-room self-segregation and isolation of minority and disabled students. Following a meeting with Denis Hart and Amanda Sher, KHS has offered to provide the HRC with periodic reports of specific efforts to address social justice concerns.

D. The Commission continues its outreach to and cooperation with other human rights agencies in the area and in the state. Members have attended meetings of a regional group of HRCs, including Ferguson, Dellwood, St. Charles, and St. Peters, as well as the annual Missouri Human Rights Conference. Alisa Warren, Executive Director of the Missouri Human Rights Commission, has been invited to attend the HRC meeting in February or

March, 2017.

E. After presentation of the results of the Kirkwood Disability Survey to the City Council, the HRC continues to work with Paraquad and St. Louis ARC to address the unmet needs identified in the survey. A symposium on social justice for the disabled is being planned for early Spring of 2017.

3. The Commission held its annual essay contest for high school juniors from KHS and Vianney early in the year. The topic was “What Can I Do to Foster Human Rights in Our Community.” Winners received awards and were recognized at the April meeting of the City Council. This year’s contest was notable in that the problems identified by some student writers were taken note of and are being addressed by KHS staff, as noted in paragraph 2C of this report.

4. The revised guidelines for an award recognizing an individual's outstanding contributions to human rights in our community were accepted, and the process for choosing recipients was formalized. Members will maintain a list of potential recipients through the year, and the winner will be chosen at the January meeting.

5. The Commission continues to raise awareness of our role and scope by improving our communications with the public.

A. Secretary Amanda Sher has made significant improvements to the HRC's Facebook page, and traffic on the page is increasing.

C. We have been able to make use of the opportunity to spread information about our work through the utility bill inserts.

D. The Commission, in collaboration with the City and Kirkwood Neighbors United Sub-Committee on Disabilities, began the development of a user friendly index of support services and a new web page format for use by concerned residents.

