

The Kirkwood Human Rights Commission 2014 Annual Report

First, we apologize for the late presentation of this Report. Please know it had nothing to do with any lack of commitment and passion for the work of this Commission. Sometimes, life intervenes.

2014 began with our newly reworked Strategic Plan. It has been an immense help with internal organization and keeping projects moving forward. It continues, of course, to be an evolving document, with a scheduled meeting every year for updating. Also, our official brochure was updated this year.

The year continued with the forming of a new group in Kirkwood. We flew under the name of the Joint Community for a while, not knowing who we were and so what our name would be. It was formed with the inclusion of three groups: members of the Kirkwood Human Rights Commission (KHRC), Meacham Neighborhood Improvement Association (MNIA), and the Community for Understanding and Hope (CFUH). The intent was collaboration and action. Several members of the Commission were charter members and continue to be very active.

Further, in the beginning of the year we began a Speaker's Series that took place during our regular meetings. The Speakers were Paul Coutino who spoke about a program called "Transforming Society", Peter Wilson spoke about the Webster Groves Alliance for Interracial Dignity (we made no mention of a bell!), Chief Jack Plummer and Kiden Smith who spoke about a very disturbing incident involving racial slurs, Rebecca Wiedekehr spoke about a program called Witnessing Whiteness, Genevieve Hodges spoke about the Ready in 3 Program, Pam Coaxum from the St. Charles HRC, spoke about their Art Fair, and Brandie Martine and our own John Hoffmann spoke about their work regarding citizen disability needs. We had a number of citizens attending and we decided that this would stand as our Conference for this year.

The Essay Contest had a record 59 essays! They were all terrific and it took a long time to read them!

We also received a Fair Housing Grant from the Missouri Commission on Human Rights (MCHR) for \$1000.00 to be used to learn more about Housing issues. Several members of the Commission attended a number of Housing related workshops and training opportunities.

In March, we said good bye and see you later...to Mike Brown. Mike was with us from the beginning of the new Commission and led us well. He was invaluable in our efforts with the Post Office Disability Parking and the Greenbriar covenant.

And in May we were introduced, by Mayor McDonnell, to our new Chief Administrative Officer, Russ Hawes. Russ wasted no time in becoming a wonderful source of new,

exciting ideas and amazing support. And we're not just saying this....he's been terrific!

Thanks.....

We also began discussions about the Anonymous Complaint Form. It was initially discussed in the MNIA and was now being discussed in the new Neighborhood Group. (Which is now known as the Kirkwood Neighbors United or KNU.) We do love our acronyms! Ultimately, with huge help from Russ, a final copy and new name were created. And it is now known as The Caretaker Alert Form. The most important part of the form is with a number on it, the writer can remain anonymous. It is available in City Hall, the library, the Community Center, and soon in Turner School in Meacham.

Action can be tracked via a dedicated area on the city's website. It is being used more and more...with everyone's safety in mind.

In June, we began the discussions concerning an Art Fair and partnering with the Kirkwood Schools. This was very exciting and a long held desire. It was further discussed to have the Art Fair, instead of the Essay Contest. Ultimately, it would be decided to do both. We love reading those Essays. Actually, seriously...we do!

Also, in the summer we lost to their terms expiring the last of the members from before the Mediation Agreement...John Hoffmann and Genevieve Hodges. They were our steadying voices in the very beginning, when the Commission was just getting a handle on who we were and who we wanted to become.

As we began August and September, the events in Ferguson were front and center. Pastor David Bennett was invited to report on his efforts, our Chair Darnel Frost, who grew up in Ferguson, reported his activities, and yet another group began. We first met at Cathy's Kitchen in Ferguson. Attending were Darryk Dean from the Department of Justice (DOJ), Alisa Warren and Gina Montgomery from the MCHR, members of the KHRC, and members from the Ferguson Human Rights Commission, St. Charles, and University City. This is a group in process of becoming and we have just recently decided a name...Regional Human Rights Commission. RHRC!! You had to know that was coming!! At one point Alisa looked up and made the comment "We have federal, state, and local all represented here." It was very exciting. We took a little break recently for the Chair of the Ferguson Human Rights Commission to get elected to their City Council! Yay Ella!

In October, our regular meeting had to be cancelled because we did not have a quorum. We currently only have 8 of the needed 9 Commission members. This summer 3 of us will be termed out, leaving only 5 members. We are a passionate and so a busy Commission and need to be fully staffed. Further training with possibly Fred Falker has been discussed, when the new members of the Commission are on board.

The Enforcement for the unanimously passed LGBT Ordinance remains an interesting journey. The details of the Enforcement were revised considerably this year.

As we closed out a very interesting, sometimes heart wrenching, always busy year, we noticed an overriding presence of collaboration. This is not work that is done in a vacuum. This is community work. Collaboration happened within Kirkwood with events including CFUH, KNU, community speakers, Kirkwood schools, the Kirkwood Library, and other Kirkwood Boards. Collaboration further happened with other local Human Rights Commissions, our state Commission on Human Rights, and the Department of Justice. And finally collaboration with you, our own City government, through our CAO, staff, and Council.

This is truly Community work and it is our honor to be part of it.

Thank you for your help and stay tuned.