

KIRKWOOD HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2018

In 2018 the Kirkwood Human Rights Commission continued its commitment to work with other agencies to insure that the promise of equal rights for all is fully realized in our city.

We have continued our association with the Kirkwood Police Department, the Kirkwood R-7 School District, the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association, the Kirkwood-Des Peres Chamber of Commerce, and the Missouri Human Rights Commission, and have established connections with Metropolitan Congregations United and Arch City Defenders, as well as opening a conversation with the Kirkwood Building Commissioner's office.

During the first half of 2018, the Commission said grateful farewells to members Dr. Jill Johnson, Morris Fletcher, and Ron Hodges, and welcomed new members Dr. Ronda Wallace and Geoffrey Morrison. Dr. Wallace is a highly-respected educator and a resident of Meacham Park; Mr. Morrison is a former Kirkwood Police Officer who worked closely with young people. Their experiences and strengths have been valuable additions.

In **January**, the Commission took part in the Dr. Martin Luther King Day celebrations, held at Kirkwood High School. The winner of our 2017 essay contest read his essay to the audience. The commission set up and staffed a table with information about our goals and activities, handing out information and taking the names of those interested in finding out more about us. Member Judy Moticka published an article titled "Commission Dedicated to Valuing Diversity" in the Webster-Kirkwood Times. Members Denis Hart, Judy Moticka, and Jill Johnson attended a workshop on recent changes to the Missouri Human Rights Act. At that workshop the KHRC was commended by the Missouri Commission for the "Statement of Inclusion" that now hangs at Kirkwood City Hall.

February brought a visit to the KHRC's monthly meeting by The Reverend Susan Sneed, president of Metropolitan Congregations United, on their work on breaking the School to

Prison Pipeline. Her well-received talk brought to the forefront the need for the KHRC to work more closely with MCU in the future. The Ad Hoc Committee which organized the Art Exhibit suggested that the event could be made more useful in the future with simplified guidelines and a more popular venue.

Denis Hart and Judy Moticka continued and widened our connection with Kirkwood High School. Next year, we hope to be able make a presentation to high-school juniors about the Commission and our work, and to establish continuing contacts with the Gay-Straight Alliance and other KHS organizations promoting social justice issues.

In **March**, Commission members Judy Moticka and Denis Hart participated in the Kirkwood R-7 School District's Equity Walks program, visiting schools and reporting on the effect their buildings and grounds might have on minority students or those facing physical or developmental challenges.

The 2017 annual report was presented at the March 1 City Council meeting.

The vote for winners of the 2018 Essay Contest was conducted at the March meeting, with the following winners, all from Kirkwood High School:

Ist. Prize: Maisie Bradley

2nd Prize: Madison Charleville

3rd Prize (tie): Alice Reider and Eli Boshara

Denis Hart, Morris Fletcher, and Josh Lewis formed a subcommittee to address the important issue of including Universal Housing Design standards in Kirkwood's expectations of homebuilders

In **April**, after Kirkwood R-7 School District hired Michelle Condon as Superintendent, Denis Hart and Judy Moticka held a productive meeting with the senior administrative team about the issues raised by the student essays submitted to our 2018 contest. During

the meeting they were informed that the District plans to add 4 new African-American teachers for the next academic year.

Work continued on Universal Design, with Denis Hart reporting that we are attempting to get the issue placed on the agenda for the City Council planning session in July.

In **May**, Josh Lewis reported that he had reached out to contractors to determine costs when universal design is included in new home construction. It is thought it could be 2% to 5% more. Gina Hilberry, President and Principal of Cohen Hilberry Architects, a disability consultant with expertise in universal/inclusive design, attended a meeting of the Diverse Abilities subcommittee to talk about Universal Design. She has volunteered to critique the "white paper" that the subcommittee is preparing for consideration by the City Council.

Denis Hart reported that he had met with Russ Hawes who was enthusiastic regarding the Diverse-Abilities Recognition Storefront Sticker Initiative. In addition, a meeting had been held with Jim Wright, President of the Kirkwood/Des Peres Chamber of Commerce, who was also enthusiastic and who intends to share information regarding the initiative with other area Chambers of Commerce on May 15. It is hoped that businesses will embrace the initiative and secure a Diverse-Abilities "Recognition Sticker" to place in their storefront window by hiring individuals with disabilities or permitting their store to be a training site teaching them a trade.

In **June**, the KHRC welcomed new members Dr. Ronda Wallace and Geoff Morrison and our new liaison from the City Council, Maggie Duwe, who has previously served with distinction on the KHRC.

The commission conducted its annual election of officers, with the following result:

Denis Hart, Chair

Bob Boyd, Vice Chair

Amanda Sher, Secretary.

After discussion, the Commission voted to continue holding the Art Exhibit for middle-school students at the Kirkwood Public Library. It will be clearly described as an exhibit, not a competition. Judy Moticka will head the ad hoc committee for this event.

In **July**, Michael-John Voss, President of Arch City Defenders, gave the Commission an overview of his organization's work. They use direct legal services, impact litigation and policy and media advocacy to promote social justice issues, and work to counter the criminalization of poverty and state violence against the poor and people of color.

In **August and September** the Commission put into action the plan for the Art Exhibit, in conjunction with Kirkwood Public Library. Judy Moticka contacted art teachers and language arts teachers at Nipher and North Middle Schools and passed out fliers to students at the Greentree Festival. The KHRC also decided to take part in the Library's "One Book, One Kirkwood" program next year.

In **September**, we planned, set up, and staffed our booth at Greentree Festival, led by Geoff Morrison. During the weekend, we made contact with several social-justice related groups, including the Kirkwood Human Rights Coalition, the Niemann Shelter for abused women, and Be SMART For Kids. All of these organizations have expressed eagerness to send reps to speak at a KHRC meeting.

Also in September, we received a follow up report on the progress of our Universal Design initiative, including an update from the ad hoc committee and a briefing at the August meeting by Chief Administrative Officer Russ Hawes about the positive progress of the White Paper in the City Council. The commission heard a presentation from

Kirkwood Police Chief Murphy about the presentation by the Alliance for Interracial Dignity hosted by the Ellisville and Chesterfield police departments. Chief Murphy reviewed the bias training that Kirkwood officers receive.

In **October**, we reviewed the report by Denis Hart and Geoff Morrison of a scheduled meeting with Police Chief Murphy. The meeting included discussion of the incident at Clayton IHOP, body cameras, tasers, and traffic stops. Geoff, Denis, Ronda Wallace and Amanda Sher plan to hold such meetings on a quarterly basis.

The Diversabilities subcommittee finalized the design of the window sticker to be awarded to businesses that train and hire or provide safe spaces for persons facing physical or developmental challenges

In **November**, the KHRC hosted the second annual Fall Forum at the Community Center on Friday, November 2. The speaker was Missouri State Representative Bruce Franks, Jr. of the 78th District. The attendance was lighter than hoped, but totaled more than 50. Rep. Franks gave a powerful account of his own experiences while growing up in a challenged neighborhood and while working to achieve racial justice, and spoke frankly of the practical politics needed to accomplish social justice goals.

Also in November, the Art Exhibit was held, with Judy Moticka working with the Kirkwood Library to receive and exhibit works by Kirkwood area middle-school students. The KHRC also decided to take part in the Library's "One Book, One Kirkwood" program next year.

In **December**, the Commission heard from two members of the gun-safety group Be Smart for Kids, Karen Leonard and Peggy Nuefield. The group educates adults about such basics as gun locks and safe storage of guns and ammunition in an effort to reduce the number of gun-related accidents involving children. Emily Kuttenkuler, a representative of the Kirkwood United Church of Christ, attended the meeting to find out more about our work and to explore avenues of cooperation. Commissioner William Winter, who works

closely with the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association, told the commission about their adopt-a-family program, for which they are seeking outside help with funding. Public Information Officer Beth von Behren provided the Commission with a very useful "Tip Sheet for Publicity and Communications."

As 2018 came to an end we were looking forward to the 2019 Essay Contest and to the Martin Luther King Day event to be held at Kirkwood High School. For their help with the work we have done and the work we will be doing, the Commission extends our thanks to Chief Administrative Officer Russ Hawes and the staff of the City of Kirkwood, most especially Kathie Valentine; to Chief Brian Murphy and the Kirkwood Police Department; and to the many outside organizations who have joined in or enabled our efforts. Finally, we wish to thank the many citizens of Kirkwood who, by attending or taking part in our events and meetings, have encouraged us to carry on.