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## Niagara County residents take a 'Stand Against Racism'

By Aaron Besecker  
News Niagara Reporter

NIAGARA FALLS - Racism will live on no matter how many people stand in the rain and demonstrate against it.

That was part of the message delivered today by Bill Bradberry, president of the NAACP's Niagara Branch, during a Niagara Falls event to coincide with the YWCA's "Stand Against Racism."

Members of the Niagara County community joined with people across the state, New Jersey and Pennsylvania as part of the second annual event.

One of the day's first local events took place in Niagara Falls City Hall, where about 30 people gathered in City Council chambers.

Bradberry, also the head of the city's Human Rights Commission, told those assembled the day's activities wouldn't eliminate racism, but showed the community is willing to take a stand.

"We're not going to bring an end to discrimination by gathering together every year and saying we're against it, are we?," Bradberry said. "But what we will do today is take a



stand. ... It's a simple thing where we all commit ourselves to saying and believing and living a life that is committed to justice and equality."

Today's events extended across the county and were organized by the YWCA of Niagara and the YWCA of the Tonawandas. The event started last year at a YWCA in New Jersey. Organizers had hoped to get 25,000 people to participate this year.

Students participated in Lockport's John E. Pound Elementary School and Newfane Elementary School, as well as Gaskill Preparatory and Cataract Elementary in Niagara Falls.

Other "Stand" events took place at various Niagara Falls school locations, the YWCA of Niagara's Carolyn's House, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara, the Doris W. Jones Family Resource Building and Niagara University.

During the event in Falls City Hall, Mayor Paul A. Dyster told the crowd there's a temptation in the wake of the election of President Obama, the nation's first African-American chief executive, that we're done addressing the issue of racism in the United States.

"But as we have been reminded right here in our own community within the last year, there's still a long ways to go," Dyster said. "There's still a lot of work to be done in making certain that everyone in our society can live free from discrimination, harassment, fear of retaliation."

Dyster was referring to the case of a Public Works and Parks Department employee who hung a "white's only drinking fountain" sign in the city's public works garage in August.

James R. Curtis, 52, of 80th Street, was sentenced last month to three years' probation, 50 hours in the Niagara County works program and mandatory cultural diversity training.

At his sentencing, he told the judge that putting up the sign was "the stupidest thing I have ever done in my life."

That's not the only racial issue in the city's consciousness. A discrimination lawsuit filed by six black public works employees against the city in November 2003 lingers in court.

Just after noon Friday, Niagara University students gathered outside Dunleavy Hall as part of the "Stand."

Tavon Rowe, a freshman from New York City, and Joe Fitzpatrick, a senior from North Tonawanda, recited an untitled poem they wrote for the occasion before a crowd of


about 50 people.

"Today, we not only intend to raise awareness of the issues of racism," sophomore Teresa Watkins said as part of the event's introduction, "we intend to effect real change in the lives of ourselves, our family, friends and co-workers."

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