



STAND AGAINST RACISM: Group leads county-wide pledge against intolerance

**<!--Mark Scheer--><table width="234" border="0" cellspacing="0" cellpadding="0" background="http://static.cnhi.zope.net/flashpromo/niagaragazette/images/byline_234x60.jpg" height="60"><tr><td><div align="center">By Mark Scheer
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— Community leaders and residents across Niagara County joined together Friday to commit to a common cause — putting a stop to acts of discrimination and other forms of social injustice.

From Niagara Falls to Lockport — with stops at churches, schools and community halls in between — participants in the YWCA of Niagara’s second annual “Stand Against Racism” pledged to make the community a better place through acts of kindness and tolerance.

And while acknowledging the need to put more action behind the words, those making the pledge expressed hope that their small commitment would lead to big changes in the way people of various races, genders and ethnic backgrounds treat one another in the days and years ahead.

“What we will do today is take a stand,” said Bill Bradberry, former Niagara Falls city administrator who participated in event ceremonies held at City Hall. “It’s a simple gesture.”

Bradberry, who serves as the president of the local chapter of the NAACP and chairman of the Niagara Falls Human Rights Commission, noted the county’s history is filled with instances in which individuals took strong stands against issues of intolerance, including 21,000 residents who joined a grassroots advocacy organization

known as the Anti-Slavery Society back in 1837. Bradberry said the foundation for that anti-slavery movement and others started with “simple” gestures on the part of a few dedicated people who inspired others.

“I would ask all of you today to take this very simple gesture very seriously,” Bradberry said.

The YWCA’s Stand Against Racism movement included organizations throughout New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Adults recited a pledge to stand with the YWCA against “racism and discrimination of any kind” and to “commit to a lifetime of promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people” in the community and the world. Children in all three states made similar pledges to “treat everyone with kindness and respect” and treat others the way they would like to be treated by “showing friendship everywhere.”

While the Stand focused primarily on the issue of racism, participants also called for a higher level of tolerance for all individuals, regardless of gender, ethnic background or religious beliefs.

Later Friday about a dozen people participated in a Stand in front of the Unitarian Universalist Church on Main Street, their bright umbrellas opened against the deluge, their spirits high despite the weather.

“We’ve elected a black president and that’s a milestone, but it doesn’t mean there aren’t important issues to address, like opportunity and dignity and education for everyone,” said Ed McGreevy, a member of the church. McGreevy urged those who want to participate in an exchange about discrimination attend a adult education class at the Unitarian Church, 639 Main St., at 9:45 a.m. Sunday morning.

Mayor Paul Dyster was at both protests, first at City Hall and then later under an umbrella in the rain on Main Street. He noted that Niagara Falls had 10 events planned for the day, more than Buffalo and Niagara County. “I’m proud of that,” he said.

Dyster, whose administration has dealt with several racially charged issues, including the hanging of a “whites-only” sign above a drinking fountain at the Department of Public Works garage, re-affirmed his commitment to eliminating discriminatory behavior from the city’s workplace and in the city as a whole.

“There’s still a long ways to go,” he said. “There’s still a lot of work to be done.”

City employee Emmitt Cox, a member of the “Niagara Falls six” which has a lawsuit pending against the city, attended the event at City Hall and said, while a good start, much more needs to be done from here. Cox recommended that Dyster and other city officials consider additional anti-racism educational events in the future, including the scheduling of events related specifically to workplace discrimination issues and minority hiring.

“At least he’s giving an effort,” Cox said of the Dyster administration, “but we’ve got to do more than just try. We might never get rid of racism, but we’ve got to take baby steps to try to get rid of it.”

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