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News

Group takes united stance against racism

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By JENNIFER ABEL

Staff writer

NEW BRITAIN — “The only thing that will beat racism is love.” So said Ronald Davis, president of New Britain’s NAACP chapter, when he and two others spoke during the “Take a Stand Against Racism” event hosted by the New Britain YWCA during the Friday noon hour.

In keeping with the “Take a Stand” theme, the room had only a few chairs, all pushed against a wall; the audience stood for the 40-minute presentation.

“The ‘Stand Against Racism’ was initiated by the YWCA in Trenton, N.J.” in 2008, said Tracy Madden-Hennessey, executive director of the YWCA in New Britain. According to Julie Rio, development director of the New Britain YWCA, its objective is to bring together people who believe racism can be eliminated through a united effort.

Davis is definitely one of those people. His parents grew up in the South during segregation days, and moved to Connecticut in the 1950s to get away from Jim Crow.

“Because we have different color skin, or different color hair, does not give us a green light to hurt people,” Davis said. “And racism does hurt people, physically and psychologically.”

in fighting racism, he says, love is the most important weapon. “How can I educate you if I hate you? Therefore, I was taught to love those that hate, but not to like their ways.”

Though Davis has not had to deal with the legally enforced racism of his parents, he said racism still affects his life. In college, he had to face fellow students who believed he did not earn his spot in school, but was allowed in under lower standards due to his race. For his first job after graduation, he worked for a company that sent him to an office in Joliet, Ill.

“I saw my file; it said ‘Ronald P. Davis, a minority candidate.’” Knowing he was hired for his color rather than his abilities naturally made him uncomfortable, so he soon quit that job and moved back to New Britain. (Davis is now Dean of Students at the American School for the Deaf, a position he’s held for 26 years.)

Mary Sanders of the Spanish Speaking Center also spoke to the audience. “Growing up, I heard all kinds of racial slurs from my grandparents,” she said. “But because I had friends of all nationalities and colors, I

shrugged it off, held my tongue when my elders spoke.” Though her grandparents were racist, her parents were not. The only time her parents ever hit her, she said, was the one time she used the word “nigger” as a child.

The third speaker was Carol Virostek, president of the state branch of the American Association of University Women. Virostek was the one who led the audience in a recitation of the “Birmingham Pledge” against racism, which was written in and named after the Alabama city considered the birthplace of the Civil Rights movement. Virostek herself played a role in the pledge’s creation. “I was a delegate to the summit on racial justice the YWCA had during Martin Luther King’s birthday week in 2007,” she said.

Delegates to the summit toured Birmingham sites made famous in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. “Our guide was a cousin of one of the little girls killed in that bombing,” Virostek said, referring to the infamous 1963 firebombing of a black church by Ku Klux Klan members. Four girls attending a Sunday school class died. Virostek continued: “For two days we examined our own biases and prejudices ... to eliminate racism in society, we have to eliminate it in ourselves.”

“Thank you so much for coming here to take this symbolic stance against racism,” Virostek said.

Jennifer Abel can be reached at jabel@ctcentral.com or by calling  (860) 225-4601 , ext. 306.

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