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News

## Stand against racism reaches all ages

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By Dan Murphy  
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TROY — More than 60 agencies across the Capital District joined the YWCA of Troy-Cohoes, Friday, to take a stand against racism.

"I think the number of organizations and businesses participating in this event speaks to the importance of the issue of racism and more importantly the importance of eliminating racism," said Kerri Neifeld, assistant director of supportive programs at the YWCA.

The event, in its second year, corresponded with like events at YWCA chapters in Connecticut and New Jersey.

The aim is to break down personal and institutional racism by increasing awareness and consciousness of community members that racial inequality still exists around the world.

Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen Jimino spoke of both the strides that have been made and the work left to be done.

"We're a little bit shortsighted if we think that we have reached the end of that journey and achieved what we need to in terms of overcoming racism. We know that we need to keep pushing forward," Jimino said. "We need to work together and we need to support each other so that we all have the equal opportunity to succeed."

Gov. David Paterson prepared a statement with his thoughts on the event, which was read by his special assistant for community affairs, Ruth Verbal.

"As the first African American to proudly serve as the governor of the great state of New York, I indeed value and respect the historically significant role that the YWCA has held in helping minorities overcome racism, discrimination and violence," said Paterson in the statement.

Rev. Doug Thomson, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Troy, has seen the ill affects of institutionalized discrimination first hand.

"We went in to the homes of the people and we discovered the subculture in Troy; bootlegging DVDs, drugs, mental health issues. There is a river of needs in Troy that overwhelmed us," Thomson said. People are carrying (guns) on the streets of Troy. There is a subculture here that some white folks are oblivious to."

Violence was a hot topic at the YWCA, which is perhaps the most damaging effect of institutionalized oppression, especially among young people. With students from Hoosick Falls High School and Russell Sage College in attendance, much of the discussion was directed towards the youth across the Capital District.

"Since August 2007, I have attended four funerals of children and teenagers who were murdered. That is a manifestation of an unjust system," said Albany Councilwoman Barbara Smith.

At the conclusion of the speeches, those in attendance gathered in front of the YWCA for a moment of silence and prayer, touting signs with the slogan "Stand Against Racism" and other anti-discrimination statements. Children from the Unity Sunshine Daycare Center joined the congregation outside, witnessing the bonds forged between the Troy residents in attendance.

"I think this is the foundation for the rest of their lives. If we teach it to the children at this age, they'll just grow up to learn that. It can only make a better community," Child Care Manager Kathi D'Angelo said.

Discussion took place as to the most effective means for fighting racism across the world. While grand steps are still left to be taken, things as simple as discussing racial inequality within your community were said to be beneficial measures.

"You need to speak out about racism even when it is uncomfortable, and it usually is," Smith said. "It's always a challenge to talk about things that have a lot of emotions attached and a lot of differences of opinion."

Once the lines of communication open, Thomson felt that there would be more of an opportunity for concrete change to take place.

"I know that sorry is not good enough. It is our actions that will speak louder than our words. People who are seen as undesirables by some in the culture here need to be raised up," he said.

The organizers of Stand Against Racism were satisfied with the large, eclectic turnout. With a variety of ages, races and genders in attendance, the YWCA's message did not fall on deaf ears.

"Today we are showing what the celebration of diversity looks like," Neifeld said. "We are demonstrating the bonds that are formed by accepting and embracing each other's differences, and we are teaching love and tolerance today instead of fear and hate."

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