

DarienPatch

VOLUNTEERS IN THE NEWS, GOVERNMENT, ARTS

Orange Ribbons Display Stand Against Racism

YWCA joins national anti-racism observance with ceremony, educational events.

By **Nancy Burton** May 1, 2010

Forty-three business and organizations in Darien took a pledge against racism Friday and festooned the town in orange ribbons to commemorate national "Stand Against Racism Day," sponsored by the Darien-Norwalk YWCA.

Selectwoman Jayme Stevenson read a pledge against racism on the front steps of the Y's offices on Kings Highway North.

By taking the pledge, participants committed themselves to become sensitive to subtle forms of racism and to dispel racist stereotypes.

"Racism still exists," said Kristin Calve, president of the YWCA's board of directors. "When you hear racist remarks or racist bullying, speak up!"

An audience of 30 Y members and Darien supporters took the pledge as children wearing orange T-shirts (the Y's official color) cavorted on the grass.

Stevenson was followed by Wendy Gerbien, who has served for three years as Connecticut's National Anthem Ambassador. In a powerful voice, Gerbien sang the Negro spiritual, "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me."

Honoring Dorothy Height

The Darien YWCA dedicated the event to the memory of [Dr. Dorothy Height](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Height) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Height), an unsung (in her lifetime) leader in the civil rights and women's rights movements, who died last week at the age of 98.

Height, whose inspirational life was celebrated by President Obama at a service in Washington, DC, was herself an employee of the national YWCA.

Height spoke in Darien five years ago at the invitation of Rita Shaughnessy, then executive director of the Darien YWCA, and Janet Evans, then director of Person-to-Person.

"She was the most gracious, elegant and extraordinarily impressive woman I've ever met in my life," recalled Shaughnessy, who joined the group to take the pledge.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me and the organization," said Shaughnessy, recalling that Height, a gifted speaker, addressed herself to the YWCA's joint mission: eliminating racism and empowering women.

Orange Ribbons Everywhere

The YWCA had been busy planning the day-long event since last November, said Maija Judelson, the Y's current executive director.

Orange ribbons were distributed to homes and businesses for display.

At the Darien Library, preschoolers were invited to color paper doll cut-outs with "multicultural" crayons in skin tones of white, peach, bronze and black.

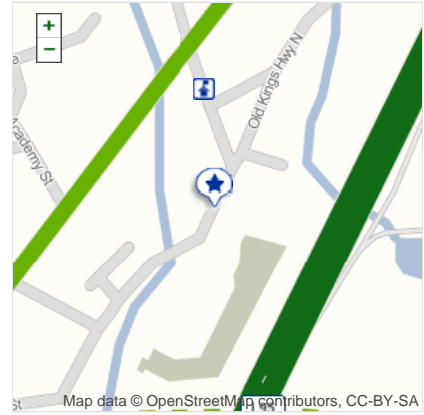
Claire Moore, children's librarian, created a "Color Me Beautiful" display encouraging the children to notice people's similarities and differences.

Toddlers and older siblings applied themselves enthusiastically to the task with Moore's patient guidance.

Other events were a "Racism - No Way" group discussion at the library's Teen Lounge and viewings of the film, "A Class Divided - Blue Eyes Brown Eyes," at the Y.

The First Congregational Church of Darien, where Dr. Height gave her address at age 93, hosted a screening of the film, "Color of Fear," on Thursday evening.

"Stand Against Racism" is a national YWCA movement begun three years ago. This year for the first time, Darien's Y planned its own coordinating events.



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