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YWCA takes Stand Against Racism

By JOE GORMAN Tribune Chronicle

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WARREN - As mayor, he has seen the positive effects of diversity and the negative effects of racism, Michael J. O'Brien said Saturday during a Stand Against Racism event at the YWCA of Warren.

O'Brien said he tries to govern his conduct by the words of former civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said we should judge people based not on the color of their skin but on the content of their character.

"Everyone in this room has their own individual story to tell on the content of their character," O'Brien said.

The goal of Stand Against Racism is to raise awareness that racism still exists in the community and that it cannot be tolerated or ignored. The Warren Stand was held in conjunction with similar events at more than 60 YWCAs throughout the country.

O'Brien said people may not be able to change the world around them unless they first start changing themselves from the inside.

Two of the three winners of the poetry award were on hand. Reanna Walls, 11, of Warren Western Reserve High School read her poem "In Racism We Stand," while Latysha Gaines, 13, of Willard School, read her poem "Today is the Day."

Walls said her poem is about how people are always competing against each other.

"Everyone wants to be better than others and put them down and that's not really how it should be," Walls said.

Gaines said as she wrote her poem, she was thinking about how King's death should have been a catalyst for all people and races to live together.

"I'm saying people should come together," Gaines said.

Madonna Chism-Pinkard, director of community relations for WFMJ and WBCB television, lead those in attendance in a racial awareness exercise.

Chism-Pinkard said when she was growing up, she experienced several instances of racism, but she did not realize what they were until she was older. She said she hoped she could help those in attendance learn some things about racism so they could stand up to it.

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Reanna Walls, 11, a student at Warren Western Reserve Middle School, reads her poem Saturday during the Stand Against Racism 2010 program at the Warren YWCA. In the background, Warren Mayor Michael O'Brien, left, and YWCA Executive Director Shari Harrell look on. To see or purchase copies of this photo and others, visit cu.tribtoday.com.
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