

May 2008
Volume 10, Issue 5

Page 1 of 4

The Alliance

Dedicated to promoting unity, justice, equal opportunity, ethnic awareness, cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for diversity.

Inside this Issue:

Membership, Board	2
People News	2
The Learning Pyramid	3, 4

Board of Directors

Becky Arenas
Natalie Avila
Linda Blauwkamp
Janie Briones
Jack Hyde
Norma Luna
Angela Taylor Perry
Mary Yedinak
Marvin Younger

ACEH to Gather at Fiesta May 2

Join us at Fiesta on Friday, May 2, for fellowship, fun, and food! Members and friends of the Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony will gather at the Holland Civic Center at 7 p.m. to take part in the 43rd annual Latin Americans United for Progress (LAUP) Fiesta (formerly Cinco de Mayo). So, check out a food booth, buy some goodies, and come hear Tomas Esparza and the Blues Experience in concert and watch the All For One dancers. See you there! Fiesta continues all day Saturday, May 3, with music and dance performances, the Queen and King contest (cheer for our new board member Natalie Avila), lowrider car show, carnival, and exhibitors.

There will be no general ACEH meeting in May. Members and friends are encouraged to register and attend the Lakeshore Region Summit on Racism—see information below.

Be Part of the Inclusion Solution— Come to the May 20 Summit on Racism

The Lakeshore Region Summit on Racism is a response to the big challenges this region faces—job losses, housing price declines, cuts in school funding, and others. Sign up for the Tuesday, May 20, Summit to learn why racial segregation leads to social and economic decline, understand how racial inclusion benefits everybody, not just a few, and develop tools to help make a positive difference in our community.

The Summit costs \$20, including lunch and a resource fair, and you can register and pay online at www.ethnicdiversity.org. The day-long event on the Hope College campus is sponsored by the Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance, hosted by Hope College, and promoted by more than twenty local businesses, churches, and organizations, including the Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony.

Featured speakers are George Herrera, entrepreneur, former head of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and creator of the "Hispanics Today" television show, and David Rusk, researcher, author, and consultant who is an expert on urban policy with a focus on the link between racial separation and critical community issues.

You can register for one of five focus sessions: A) Best Business Practices; B) Space and Race; C) Immigration in West Michigan; D) Diversity in Education, or E) Models for Ministry.

The Alliance Thanks New and Renewing Members

Welcome to new member **Alan Headbloom**, and thanks to renewing member **Linda Falstad**.

Please consider joining with Alan and Linda and other ACEH supporters as we work together for social justice and appreciation for diversity, to make West Michigan a place where all are welcomed and respected. The ACEH dues structure is as follows:

Individual: \$20.00 one year; \$35.00 two years
Family: \$30.00 one year; \$50.00 two years
Nonprofit: \$40.00 one year
Business: \$75.00 one year

The ACEH fiscal year runs October 1 – September 30. In lieu of, or in addition to, paying dues, you may make a pledge of service to ACEH. Checks or service pledges should be written to ACEH and sent to Treasurer, c/o ACEH, P. O. Box 3007, Holland, MI 49422-3007. To pay by credit card, please go to the ACEH website www.harmonyalliance.org, click on "Join Us" and use the secure Pay Pal system.

Board Members Elected to Lead ACEH

Five new members were elected to full terms on the ACEH board at the general meeting April 11: Natalie Avila, Jack Hyde, Norma Luna, Rev. Angela Taylor Perry, and Mary Yedinak. They will join Becky Arenas, Linda Blauwkamp, Janie Briones, and Marvin Younger as ACEH directors, and will elect officers at the May 6 board meeting. Information about the directors will be available on the website www.harmonyalliance.org.

Leaving the board after several years of service are Liz Barveld, Bin Lim, Eleanor Lopez, and Kim Romero; their work for ACEH is deeply appreciated.

News of Members and Friends

Kim Harris, customer service specialist at Davenport University, Holland, has won the Commitment to Service Award of the Michigan Campus Compact. Kim volunteered more than 300 hours of service while attending Davenport and working as a student employee. She will receive a \$1,000 scholarship. Congratulations, Kim.

Ruth Coleman is graduating this spring from Grand Valley State University with a master's degree in social work. Way to go, Ruth!

Currently visiting Holland's sister city, Querétaro, and other locations in Mexico are **Phil and Kathy Beal, John and Mary Buttrey**, and **Herb and Ann Weller**.

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Our sincere sympathy to **Kim and David Douglas** and family on the recent death of Kim's father, Ronald Meilicke, in Hayward, Wisconsin, March 30. Mr. Meilicke was 74.

The Learning Pyramid

By Allison Smith

Allison Smith is a junior psychology major at Hope College. She plans to attend graduate school in August 2009 for a master's degree in social work and then return to her hometown of Gary, Indiana, to provide therapy services to the impoverished. Her essay, which follows in excerpted form, was the 2008 winner of the 12th annual Multicultural Essay Contest, coordinated and supported by Hope's Office of Multicultural Education and the CrossRoads Project. Students were asked to choose an individual who has been a role model for understanding and advocating issues of diversity and equality and to describe how the person has motivated and inspired them. Ms. Smith's essay began with a frame of words resembling a pyramid, in which she said: "Analyzing my own biases and overcoming discrimination and injustice is an ascension to new heights, and an addition of building blocks. Whenever I think that I am finished with the construction of this learning pyramid, there is some circumstance lurking at the top that crumbles all of the blocks and sends me careening back to the bottom. Thus, I am forced to reexamine, refocus, redefine, and start the building again." ACEH thanks her for permission to include this excerpt in our newsletter.

"Come on, pick up the phone!" she mumbled. She *really* needed to talk to her father. A third job interview had been nothing more than a colossal waste of time and another confirmation that qualifications didn't matter as much as skin color. She needed to hear the wise words of a man who had lived through it all--from Jim Crow segregation, to discrimination in the military, to the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, he answered the phone, and his deep soothing voice melted away some of her stress. "Hi, Daddy, it's me," said the girl. "Hey, baby girl, how are you?" "I'm not so good, Daddy. I'm really tired of going to job interviews knowing that I am qualified and then not being chosen for the position. It's starting to negatively affect my peace of mind and feelings towards the majority culture." "I understand how you feel, baby girl, but--". "NO BUTS, DADDY!" the young woman cut her father off mid-sentence. "When I email these people and they see my standard American name, they just assume I must be White. They're impressed with my resume and my letters of recommendation. When I schedule the interview they say 'Oh, I can't wait to finally meet you!'" said the young girl in her most sarcastic voice as she imitated the interviewers. "It's so heartbreaking! It's so unfair! Once I arrive my ethnicity betrays me and I can see the excitement drain from their faces--- and in its place is disappointment. Please tell me it's not going to be like this forever! I'm not sure that I'm strong enough to withstand it!" said the young woman as hot tears poured down her face. He tried to calm his daughter but he had been in her position many times. It broke his heart and there was nothing he could do about it. She told him that despair was taking root in her heart, because she had been victimized many times since she began college. If this seed of hatred, anger, and fear continued to be nurtured by unjust setbacks, it could not only destroy her spirit and faith, but also the motivation to pursue her passion of social activism and helping those in need.

The above anecdote is a tragic reality for many minority people in America today. It is a brief snapshot of the obstacles I have so tenaciously tried to overcome. Unbeknownst to most, the ridicule, ostracism, and unearned second-class treatment were taking a toll on how I felt about diversity and how I related to others. I had begun to see anyone who did not share in my struggle as a person of color as *the enemy*. *They* don't understand and *they* don't care. Life is perfect for *them*, I told myself.

Then I met Dr. Madonna Constantine, a professor of psychology and education at Columbia University Teachers College, who has published over 25 articles exploring cultural competency in counseling and supervision, as well as the mental health of minorities. Nevertheless, her many achievements and publications are not the driving force for my admiration. It is her spirit and determination to withstand bigotry, racial hatred, and discrimination and her refusal to hate those who have tried to destroy her career.

Madonna Constantine was the victim of a heinous hate crime. On October 24, 2007, a four-foot-long noose was found hanging on her office door, sparking a public outcry and protests from the minority community. Dr. Constantine was courageous and steadfast; she publicly denounced the acts, but never lost her faith or ambition and zest for racial unity. The incident sparked emotions for me because in October 2005 my friend found a racial epithet written on her door in our dormitory here at Hope. That same week we were almost run down by individuals who screamed racial epithets from their car windows. I understood how betrayed and vulnerable Dr. Constantine must have felt. To face the cameras and still advocate for diversity and love for all was no easy task, and she told me so in person at a November 2007 conference, "Issues in Multicultural Supervision."

When I arrived at this conference, I was broken-spirited, internally withdrawn from people around me, and beginning to feel that diversity was an unrealistic goal. I entered the conference room ready to listen but not ready to learn. I was in for a surprise.

At the conference Dr. Constantine taught me to analyze myself. I learned to look inward and not just outward when trying to find biases and prejudices that needed to be purged. She stated that it is difficult to learn and appreciate other people if we do not understand ourselves. Now I had heard that before, but it became personal because of the struggles in my life. I *needed* to understand my own brewing biases *before* I could fight against the injustices that had happened to me. This was a novel way of thinking. I wanted to react to the issues in my own life, but I had never once considered self-examination as a first step. By confronting myself, I could confront others' prejudice with empathy and a clear conscience.

Second, I learned to acknowledge each individual's unique psychological development, moral development, and self-awareness. If a person discriminates against another, the behavior is not excused because of delayed development,

(Continued on Page 4)

The Alliance

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*Bringing People
Together from Worlds
Apart*

The Learning Pyramid, by Allison Smith

(Continued from Page 3)

but it does made a difference in how the situation is approached. I remind myself that each person is an *individual* who does not share the same life experiences. I now combine faith in Christ, patience, and my efforts to educate others and change unjust laws when reacting to injustices. It takes this combination to destroy years of hatred.

Last, Dr. Constantine taught me to develop intercultural sensitivity. I have been guilty of subscribing to a term she labels *denial difference*, thinking that "my worldview is reality and nothing else is important." We should not dehumanize the other (even if they have victimized us). Refraining from thinking that "*those* people are simple, they don't value life like we do" is central to creating unity between people who may have very different ways of thinking and value systems.

I am active in multicultural life and education, and have strived to improve race relations and unity on campus. Thankfully, Dr. Constantine's lessons were instilled in me while I was at a low point. She inspires me to continue fully embracing diversity and refrain from fixating on negative emotions that erupt in response to injustice. She inspires me to do *more* to achieve my goals of serving others and spreading awareness about racial inequality and cultural sensitivity versus retreating into a state of complacency and learned helplessness. And she reminds me that self-evaluation is a critical component in development. She warns, though--- this is not always easy. When we look inward and see a dark, ugly, undesirable characteristic, we are ashamed to admit we own it, even to ourselves. If we as people share no other similarity, recognizing that *we all* harbor negative character traits is a common thread that could be used to weave all of us together.

Bringing together diverse populations requires acknowledging the history and current conditions of every ethnic group. We cannot deny history and we cannot deny that discrimination exists, even today. I find that this is a great barrier on Hope's campus. Oftentimes the pain of discriminatory acts is minimized. An insensitive student flier may not seem like a major transgression---but one cannot make that call unless they are the target of such acts. Additionally, the campus needs to be more *proactive*. An excellent proposal is an anti-hate campaign that will be part of orientation weekend, requiring faculty, students, and staff to work together to ensure that freshmen become part of a more unified campus that openly discourages discrimination.

Remember the girl seeking advice from her father?

"Hey, baby girl, I was calling because you were sounding really low the last time we spoke," said the very concerned father. "Daddy, I was just about to call you. I'm lacing up my boots and putting on my tool belt, I'm on my way to the top again!" exclaimed the excited and rejuvenated young woman. "Care to explain what sparked this change of heart?" asked the surprised father. "Daddy. I met this woman named Dr. Madonna Constantine...."

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