

Diversity group touts gains, eyes good second year

BY DARRELL CLEM • OBSERVER STAFF WRITER • OCTOBER 17, 2010

Heartened by strides it made in its inaugural year, Plymouth-Canton Citizens for Diversity and Inclusion plans to continue carving a path in hopes that community groups, elected boards and government labor pools can become more reflective of the community's increasingly diverse population.

Dozens of volunteers representing a wide range of cultures and ethnic groups attended PCCDI's second annual community forum Wednesday evening at Pioneer Middle School, citing first-year gains yet realizing much work remains to achieve a more inclusive community.

“Last year we were very much a fledgling group,” said Stan Olszewski, a PCCDI strategic planning board member.

Perhaps, but PCCDI cited numerous milestones:

- The group worked to help elect the first African-American candidate, Adrienne Davis, to the Plymouth-Canton school board.
- A clothing drive organized with the Canton Mosque brought in large donations that helped the community at large.
- PCCDI worked alongside Canton Township officials to broaden recruiting efforts to reach minorities for a potential job pool. Though budget woes have stalled most new hires, Jeffery Shamberger, PCCDI vice chair, said he hopes the measures will eventually lead to more people of color getting hired for positions such as police officers and firefighters.

However, PCCDI members said their efforts are intended not to meet a racial quota, but to find qualified minority candidates.

- PCCDI formed ties with the Canton Community Foundation, allowing potential donors to log onto www.cantonfoundation.org and provide financial support for the group.
- Alongside parents and school representatives, PCCDI members worked with the Plymouth-Canton district to successfully attract more minority educators for this school year and to support an African-American high-school history course.

“I think it was really a productive summer,” said Shelley Clifton, who heads up PCCDI's education committee.

- PCCDI nurtured its ties to a larger organization, the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion, by becoming involved in events such as a regional diversity walk on Belle Isle.
- More recently, PCCDI has launched the initial phase of Time Banking, a project intended to link people who have needs, such as tutoring or transportation to doctor's offices, with those who can help. The effort will place emphasis on helping residents with disabilities.

“Many people are unemployed, and many people are hurting,” said Anne Marie Graham-Hudak, who chairs PCCDI's strategic planning committee.

PCCDI members brainstormed about other projects it might explore during the next year, such as a film festival promoting diversity and a fund-raising golf outing as early as next spring. Clifton said PCCDI also hopes to secure funding to hire an independent, problem-solving ombudsman — likely part time — to serve as a liaison between the school district and community.

Meanwhile, one PCCDI board member, Loren Khogali, commended the Canton Police Department for a major award it received this year from the International Association of Chiefs of Police. IACP awarded the department the single-agency 2010 Civil Rights Award after Lt. Todd Mutchler led efforts to form a broad-based Canton Response to Hate Crimes Coalition.