

COMMUNITY

Hate Crime 'Coalition' aids in combating acts of hatred

By June Russell
Emerald Reporter

She may not know what to call it, but of one thing she is certain - it hasn't been easy.

"I'm not sure what it is," Cecelia Jackson, President of the Eugene Commission on the Rights of Minorities said. "I don't know if we've ever put a name on it. It's really just a lot of concerned people coming together."

"I guess you'd have to call it a coalition. A hate crime coalition. It's been a long haul getting it started, but it's really great to see people coming out and opening up."

The building of a coalition of organizations and individuals in Eugene and Springfield to combat the rise in hate crimes and acts of hatred in the community involves overcoming the traditional autonomy of the groups participating.

As human rights analyst for the city of Eugene Greg Rikhoff said, it is a difficult and on-going process.

"There is going to be a real effort in dragging people to the table," he said. "One of the important things going into these discussions was the problem of shared values. How can we all commit ourselves to sharing each others causes?"

"One of the scariest things of hate crimes is that they tend to separate us. Nothing makes a person feel more alone than being a victim. No one coming to this table does not have an issue. But we have to come to the table willing to work together."

With the passage in 1989 of the State Hate Crime Reporting Act, human rights activists and professionals have a starting place, Jackson said. In June, representatives of the Eugene and Springfield Human Rights Programs began meeting with community leaders and advocates to build responses to acts of hatred.

"The goal is to open doors between organizations and provide a unified base for community response," Rikhoff said. "It is an opportunity to create community awareness, that hate crimes are being committed here in Eugene, and hopefully to motivate people to address the problems."

"There have been quite a few community organizations working individually on hate crimes and acts of hatred, but there have been no coordination of efforts," he said. "There is a growing

need to work together and a simple need to share information."

Rikhoff cites a lack of resources and concerns for the confidentiality of the victims as common reasons why agencies and organizations have not shared information in the past. With the Hate Crime Reporting Act obliging agencies to keep statistics, net-working and the sharing of collected data have become a priority of the coalition.

"One of the strengths of the hate crime coalition is the fact that we're coming together," Jackson said. "We may not have all the same problems, but we all get treated with acts of hatred. Right now we're working on reporting incidences and collecting data to see where we're at. We've laid the foundation; now we just have to build on it."

"Among our short term goals is net-working with each other, and making sure we have a brochure out so people know what to do, who to go to."

Marshall Saucedo, Acting Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, agrees.

"When you have something like hate crimes, there can be a lot of rumors and misunderstandings," he said. There is a real need to document that this is occurring, and to tell the powers that be, i.e. city hall and other agencies.

"Another problem is how to deal with crimes when they happen, net-working among ourselves and providing assistance and support to the victims," Saucedo added. "Another issue is what stand we want to take; not just being sensitized but prosecuting these people accordingly."

"We also have to think about outreach education," Saucedo said. "All too often when we get together at these meetings we're preaching to the converted. It's important to bring in students at South Eugene and other neighborhoods, to expand awareness that this is an issue affecting the entire community, not just certain neighborhoods of populations. It's important to do that networking: the power of the masses vs. the power of the individual, and the impact we can make."

Saucedo cites ignorance and an unwillingness to accept change as the chief cause of hate crimes and acts of hatred.

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