



Thomas Patterson Emerald

University President Dave Frohnmayer applauds during a speech by city manager Jim Johnson marking a new diversity agreement.

Agencies to collaborate on diversity, human rights

■ The University becomes part of a new group formed to look at the county's diversity efforts

By John Liebhardt
Oregon Daily Emerald

A human rights consortium created Wednesday from nine public agencies and the University is formulating an action plan to gauge Lane County's efforts at fostering diversity.

Members of the 10 agencies officially inaugurated the Diversity and Human Rights Consortium as a working group that will establish a framework to share information about diversity and respond collectively to incidents.

The agencies include: Bethel Public School District 52, City of Springfield, Eugene Public School District 4J, Eugene Water and Electric Board, Lane Community College, Lane County, Lane Transit District, Springfield Public School District 19, City of Eugene and the University. DHRC will allow the 10 agencies to officially collaborate on two levels: Organizational leaders will meet yearly, and so-called "staffers," those employees responsible for human resources and multicultural affairs within each agency, will commit to regular communication.

As the next order of business, each agency will create an action plan to establish goals, time frames and evaluation tools. The University has not yet begun work on the action plan, but Linda King, the

University's director of human resources, hopes to create a working group during the spring term to begin the process. She does not have a completion date.

"This commitment that we are making is an attempt to say that we are going to do something different about diversity in this community," said Jim Johnson, Eugene city manager. Johnson likened DHRC to the way governmental agencies collaborate on any number of public policy issues, such as environmental and traffic issues.

Johnson said the action plans would hold each organization accountable to fulfilling concrete goals on diversity and awareness of other cultures.

University President Dave Frohnmayer said working as a collective unit may better facilitate diversity awareness around the county.

"We can set an example of making a collective difference that is much larger than the individual parts," he said.

Recruiting good candidates may be the first tangible change from DHRC, said William Van Vactor, Lane County administrator. Presently, each of the organizations have trouble recruiting top candidates because they cannot find proper employment for a "trailing spouse." The cooperation aspect of DHRC will change that.

"Virtually in terms of this document, Human Resource directors can very comfortably call any one of the eight other organizations and say 'We are working

this key recruitment, and can you help me with this trailing spouse?'"

Jose Ortal, director of affirmative action at LCC, feels that the real progress will be found within the new communication between peers at various institutions.

"An organization like (the University) is a big place," he said. "Getting staffers communicating will help us create the synergy to cooperate in the event a specific issue comes up."

DHRC is not the first time Lane County leaders have attempted to collectively address diversity issues. Johnson said the first serious attempt dates back to 1991 when the mayors of Eugene and Springfield, along with city and county commissioners, met to discuss diversity issues and create a loose action plan. Most of those actions did not stand the test of time, Johnson said, and the city of Eugene tried to pick the issue up again four years ago. Those discussions led to the creation of DHRC.

Knowing the track record of such efforts, many signers expressed satisfaction with DHRC's approach that contains both idealistic and pragmatic qualities.

"It is an excellent document, while very symbolically important with its statement of intent, is also a very practical document," said Michael Kelly, Springfield city manager.

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