

# Midtown Pipe & Tobacco



133 E. 13th St. Eugene (between Oak & Pearl)

## Human Rights Commission works for equality, justice

The commission works to resolve discrimination issues through mediation and administrative action

By Ayisha Yahya  
News Editor

What would you do if you walked into a restaurant and were denied service because you are gay? Or if you were refused employment because the manager felt Hispanics had inadequate English skills? What if you were treated with unnecessary suspicion because you were dressed a certain way or had particular religious beliefs?

Violations of human rights occur daily around the country. Here in Eugene, residents can get help through the City of Eugene's Human Rights Program, which aims to combat human rights violations.

Eugene initiated the Human Rights Program in the mid-1960s to work primarily on race relations. In the years following, it has evolved into an entity that seeks to address all types of discrimination and human rights issues, from community-police relations to fair housing and accessibility



Jessica Waters Photo Editor

Human Rights Commissioner Sheila Coats (left) and Francisca Leyva-Johnson discuss committee business in the Human Rights Program office at City Hall.

for the disabled.

Human Rights Program Manager Greg Rikhoff said the program's mission has been to promote the understanding and the protection of people's human rights.

"We see ourselves as an opportunity to create community response,"

he said.

The department has three staff members and more than 50 volunteers. Fourteen of the volunteers are selected by the Eugene City Council and serve on the Human Rights Commission. Most of the volunteers, who

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## Local woman fights racism, carries torch for social causes

Bahati Ansari established local "racism-free zones" to promote mutual respect

By Ayisha Yahya  
News Editor

Bahati Ansari's sonorous voice carried over the hundreds of people gathered outside Autzen Stadium for a march Aug. 28 in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech.

Quickly, she roused the crowd into song.

"If I had a hammer," Ansari sang, "I'd hammer in the morning, I'd hammer in the noontime ... I'd hammer for love, I'd hammer for justice."

The event was one of many Ansari has participated in or organized in

the name of human and civil rights. The Eugene resident has been hammering away at racism, intolerance and other forms of persecution for almost thirty years. She is currently the director of the National Racism Free Zone, which she operates from Jefferson Middle School. She also works as a counselor and Safe and Drug Free middle school coordinator at the school.

Ansari said the Racism Free Zone, which she started in response to prejudice her sons experienced at a Eugene middle school, is a project that allows people to create a space where racism and its effects can be addressed.

"It is a concept where you're creating an environment where you can deal with racism," she said.

Apart from Jefferson Middle

School, other places including Lane Community College and the city of Eugene have adopted racism-free or diversity zones. Ansari has traveled throughout the nation to talk about the project's value and even presented at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa in 2001.

To implement a zone, each group goes through an initial training, then the group declares their area racism-free. Each group tailors its own program in ways they feel will be the most beneficial. Ansari said they must rededicate the space annually as a constant reminder of their commitment.

"Kids get involved in it," she said. "They make it their own." She said Jef-

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