

It wasn't easy, but Keizer's diversity committee is ready to get to work

By **JOEY CAPPELETTI**
Of the *Keizertimes*

Councilor Shaney Starr made her first notable decision as part of the Keizer City Council by selecting Anthony Rosilez to join Keizer's newly formed Community Diversity Engagement Committee.

Rosilez's appointment Monday night finalized the nine-person committee and followed more than a year of work by the city council.

Like many cities in 2020, racial justice reform was at the center of attention during many Keizer City Council meetings throughout the year. As both community members and city councilors spoke out about improving equity and inclusion in Keizer, the city council worked to develop their "statement of values" that addressed justice, equity, diversity and inclusion late in 2020.

The statement of values, among other things, condemned any discrimination and outlined a commitment to being a city that welcomes every person regardless of race, sexuality, religion, gender or any other identity.

At a Nov. 9, 2020 work session where the council was working to finalize their statement, Benny Williams, the president of the Salem-Keizer NAACP, addressed the council on their proposed resolution.

"If we are going to be progressive, we have to understand progress is when we all come together. And when we come together, not only do we see progress, we progress together. Nobody is left behind," Williams said. "We have that opportunity starting tonight as this body has been working towards coming up with a resolution to have everyone in this city recognize that we are all equal. We will continue to have differences but we will not marginalize any of us."

The city's statement of values, finalized at a Dec. 7, 2020 council meeting, was seen as a step in the right direction but was also only "an aspirational statement" and did not "create any legal call of action or modify any existing rights."

Impact hindered by council debate

While the statement of values provided the city with an outline, the council struggled at times in 2021 to fully implement its values.

At a meeting in June, councilor Roland Herrera inquired about hanging a LGBTQ pride flag in city hall for LGBTQ Pride Month. Herrera said the flag would show the city was "walking the walk" after its December value statement.

Ross Day, who was a councilor at the time, said if they were to hang a pride flag, which he said was a "viewpoint", the city would have to allow any flags because "we're not allowed to discriminate based on viewpoint."

"What if someone wants to fly a Confederate flag up there?" Day said. "The government can't pick sides."

"The hard part gets to be who gets to fly (a flag) and who doesn't. I think rather than make that decision we are better to have a display that's here for a couple weeks or a month," Councilor Dan



Supporters of the LGBTQ community wave Pride flags on the corner of River Road in June of last year. FILE PHOTO, *Keizertimes*

Kohler said at the time. "That's a better way to go then to fight about whose flag we put up and whose we don't."

The council decided to formally create a Community Diversity Engagement Work Group to determine next steps for meaningful implementation of the city's value statement.

The work group, which included councilors Laura Reid, Roland Herrera and Elizabeth Smith, met four times between June and September of 2021 and ultimately recommended the permanent implementation of a Diversity, Inclusion and Equity committee (DEI).

DEI committees have been formed in many Oregon cities, including Wilsonville, Beaverton and Corvallis, and act in an advisory role to the city council.

Reid, Herrera and Smith recommended that Keizer's DEI committee be named the Community Diversity Engagement Committee — which was once again met with pushback.

At a Nov. 1 meeting, Day objected to including the word "diversity" in the title because of the power it would give committee members to call others racists, homophobes and bigots.

"The first time someone looks cross eyed at someone, the first time someone doesn't hold the door open for someone, one of these committee members is going to feel like they have the authority to go out and write a letter to the editor," Day said at the time. "I can promise you, there's going to be a Trojan Horse. There's going to be someone that's going to get on the committee and going to go out there and use their position to attack someone."

Day resigned following the outburst at the Nov. 1 meeting, but his concern about the diversity committee was shared by

others.

Kohler said following the meeting that Day's comments about the committee being used to attack others was a "valid concern" but that "it could have been expressed in a shorter period of time and probably a little more eloquently, however, it is a concern for me."

Committee ready to get to work in 2022

The council also decided at the Nov. 1 meeting to give each councilor the power to select one committee member. Although 17 community members ultimately ended up applying for the diversity committee, councilors weren't restricted to make their selection from this pool.

The nine-member committee, finalized with Starr's selection on Jan. 3, includes six community members, two city councilors and one student advisor. Only two of the six community member selections came from the group of applicants.

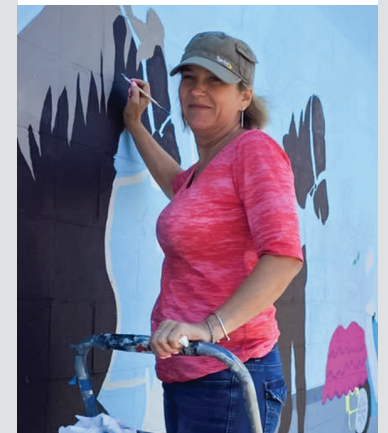
While the background of each candidate is unknown, available information indicates that the council assembled a diverse committee. Committee members include multiple people of color, a paralympic athlete, a local business owner, a former Keizer City Council, a board member from Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action and the executive director of Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission.

City Recorder Tracy Davis said that she is still working to set up the first meeting for the committee and that it will be up to them if they want to meet once or twice a month.

Community Diversity Engagement Committee meetings will be open for the public to attend.

VOLUNTEER
of the Week

presented by



KIM STEEN

Where and how do you volunteer?

"I'm the current chair of the Keizer Public Arts Commission and we are tasked with selecting, placing and maintaining public art in Keizer. It's been so fun to watch our art projects come to life! Seeing the positive reactions has been really rewarding."

Why do you volunteer?

"Volunteering is a great way for me to connect and give back to my community. I've owned a small business in Keizer for 30+ years. The Keizer community has supported me and my business and volunteering is a great way for me to make a small difference and give back."

What does volunteering do for you?

"Volunteering gives me a stronger connection to my community. It's been a great way for me to give back to a community that he been so supportive of me. Through volunteering, I've met lots of wonderful people that have enriched and positively impacted my life."

How would you get others to volunteer in their community?

"There are so many ways to get involved. To start, I would encourage anyone to go to Keizer.org and check out the many opportunities available to support our great community!"