

# Together

League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions Newsletter Vol.23 No.1 February 2009

## League continues Human Rights work with new officers and strategic plan

The work year of the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions extends from Annual Conference to Annual Conference which usually means from one September to the next. District Directors and Directors at Large are chosen from the 13 Districts in Minnesota at the business meeting held at each Annual Conference.

Currently 21 Board members meet in various cities each month to conduct the business of the League. This year the League has purchased teleconferencing equipment to ease the travel burden on those who reside far from the meeting locations from month to month.

The Board began this year with new bylaws and a strategic plan based on preliminary work by Barb Sanderson of Grand Rapids and Anne Dykstra of Golden Valley. Two Board meetings so far have been devoted to finalizing the strategic plan.

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League Board members gather for monthly meetings. This one at Brookview Community Center in Golden Valley.

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Kristi Rudelius Palmer shared information from the U of M Human Rights Center. Board members Peg Flaherty and Thelma McKenzie are among the participants in this meeting.

Local hosts often invite City Council Members and Mayors to attend League Board meetings. Mayor Jim Hovland of Edina addressed the November meeting of the LMHRC Board. (Left photo)

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## League welcomes new president



**Anne Dykstra, Ph.D.** has thirty years international and domestic experience in the U.S., Asia, Africa and the Middle East with USAID,

UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank and International Organizations as a designer, manager, administrator and consultant in education programs primarily in countries emerging from conflict or with transitional governments. Her focus has been to rebuild basic education through technically sound, fiscally sustainable and politically supported policy and practices.

With counterparts in Ministries of Education in Cambodia and Laos she led projects to reform education, establish standards and competencies, rewrite textbooks, organize book printing, warehousing and distribution, establish competencies, train teachers and school administrators through national programs, build schools and train school administrators. Her experience includes policy formation in testing and evaluation, school management and financial accountability at national and local levels. Consulting has included e-learning, planning, assessment, program evaluation, and policy development. Domestically, she founded a program to assist economically disadvantaged men and women become literate and become employed and to increase women's participation in union trades formerly closed to them.

She was a visiting scholar at the University of Minnesota, School of Education, Department of Policy and Administration, 04-08; a Fulbright Senior Specialist, 06; Sr. Advisor, Girls' and Women's Education, USAID 01-03; and Sr. Education Advisor, Iraq Project, initial phase, 03, USAID and ORHA, Kuwait; Program Director,

UNICEF, Cambodia and Laos 92-00; UN Border Relief Operation, UNDP, UNHCR, 90-92; Field Director and Program Associate, U.S. State Department Program for Refugees, Philippines 82-89; Program Manager, City of Denver, 77-80.

Her professional writing has recently focused on the contribution of education relative to peace and to conflict and rebuilding education after conflict.

**International work:** The Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, China, Nepal, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Oman, Congo DRC, South Africa.

## New Vice President on Board



**Louisa Hext** states that her personal commitment to justice extends beyond a philosophy; it

comes from a deep-seated place of reflection and process which leads her to take action. She is passionately committed to the inclusion and active participation of all individuals across the broad intersections of social, racial and economic justice.

The following accomplishments both detail and demonstrate how her philosophy translates to action.

### **Commissioner, Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission**

The primary objective of the Commission is to promote and protect the civil rights of the citizens of Minneapolis.

### **Board Member, League of Minnesota**

**Human Rights Commissions** A coalition of local human rights commissions that have been established by charter or ordinance in communities throughout Minnesota.

(Continued page 3)

**National Board Member, Astraea Foundation for Justice** Astraea is a public, charitable foundation that provides critical resources in the form of grants to under-resourced social change organizations, and individual writers and visual artists.

**Guardian ad Litem, Fourth District Juvenile Court** As a guardian ad litem or court appointed special advocate (CASA), she has been appointed by a judge to speak for a child's best interests in court hearings related to allegations of child abuse or neglect.

**Grant Reviewer for Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC)** MRAC serves audiences in Minnesota's seven-county metropolitan region through grants services, and technical assistance to the arts communities.

**Certified Trainer, Essential Lifestyle Planning** — working with individuals with disabilities to create lives that are healthy, happy and safe.

**Fellow, Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative (HNII)**, at Harvard Law School. HNII is a leadership program engaging the cutting edge conversation between the fields of negotiation and conflict management on the one hand and those of mindfulness and the great wisdom traditions on the other.

**Diversity Consultant** Ongoing training and facilitation specializing in leadership, diversity, inclusion and global culture.

**Fellow, British-American Project, International Program, John Hopkins University.** This is a program to enhance the understanding and learning experience of two diverse cultures.

**Founder, of The Jewish and Muslim Women's Dialogue**, a cross-cultural community of women coming together to share, learn and build respectful, meaningful relationships.

**Recipient**, Support Professional of the Year award by *the National Institute on Dual Diagnosis* and recognized by *The General Assembly of the State of Ohio Senate*.

**Recipient**, Next Generation Leadership Awards from *The President's Committee on Mental Retardation*, Washington, DC.

**Founder, Friendship Connection**, a social club for over 500 individuals with disabilities.

**Participant** in the *Heartland Aids Ride* between Saint Paul and Chicago, July 2001 and *The Red Ribbon Ride* between Minneapolis and Rochester, July 2003.

### **Sonja Peterson continues work as Treasurer**



Sonja Dunnwald Peterson has served as Treasurer of the LMHRC since 2005. She is commissioner on the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission, and an

attorney at Dunnwald & Peterson. P.A. in Minneapolis, MN, representing primarily employees in discrimination and employment law litigation. From 1989 to 1993, and 2001 to 2003 she was an adjunct MBA faculty member at the University of St. Thomas, teaching Employment and Discrimination Law. Sonja is also a member of the Minnesota and Hennepin County Bar Associations and the HCBA Diversity Committee. In 2000, she was the winner of the MSBA Human Rights Award "for outstanding work in the advancement of human rights."

### **Marion Helland, Secretary,**



serves on the Community Collaborative Council for the desegregation and integration of the Robbinsdale Area Schools. In 2000 Marion received the

Governor's Commission on the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Observance and the State Council on Black Minnesotans "Dream Keeper Elder Award" in recognition of her lifelong dedication to human rights.

## *Memories of Jane McPartland*



The League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions extends to the family and all friends of Jane McPartland our heartfelt condolences on the passing of our dear colleague in human rights work.

Jane was awarded the League's Life Long Service award in 1996 for her service as a member of the St Cloud Human Rights Commission and the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions of many years. She was the financial officer for the League and as well, she participated in many activities to further human rights locally and in our state.

Jane cared deeply about human rights and was always willing to advocate for justice. She was among those who could be depended upon to offer a fair and balanced view and if she committed to serve, she was there. The talent she gave to further human rights began in her community in St Cloud where she worked to better her home town. She was especially noted for her interest in education and social justice issues. However, it was in her attention and dedication to the special activities of her faith and family that Jane will be remembered. Because of her outstanding work in St Cloud, she was chosen to become a representative in the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions. As a member of the League, Jane faithfully accounted for and disbursed the funds over 25 years as treasurer and financial coordinator. Her fairness and sense of humor as she reported on the League's finances was appreciated always.

Jane's life long contributions stemmed from her willingness to quietly make sure human rights issues were addressed at local and state levels as well as her courage in taking a stand when needed. Because of her beliefs and values, she will be remembered by all of her League Colleagues and friends of many years. She made life better for others. Thank you Jane, we learned from you. You will not be forgotten.

*Anne Dykstra, President on behalf of all LMHRC Members past and present.*

Jane's work for the League was indeed tireless. She volunteered all those years for the League and her local commission which kept changing, disbanding, reforming, re-establishing. I can remember when they had a new mayor who was not in favor of having a commission. Jane ignored him and found a place for the commission to meet. She was then a senior citizen and worked with the Whitney Center [which I believe was a converted airline hanger] to negotiate space to have their meetings for no cost. She did the same for the League, securing a venue for an annual meeting in St. Cloud.

She took total care of the League finances, being certain the member cities were sent a billing for annual dues. She kept records and paid bills. She also secured a CPA firm to audit the books for a reduced fee.

Jane was also a driving force behind Unity Day in St. Cloud and served as secretary for the Baha'i group.

*Thelma McKenzie*

(continued on page 5)

Jane, besides her indispensable financial and treasury work for the League for many years, was also invaluable in staffing and setting up the League's booth at the Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association, in St. Cloud.

Jane worked closely at these critical police conferences with Mort Ryweck, the League's part-time program consultant at the time. Mort reminds us that Jane engaged the chiefs and their assistants in friendly conversations about our annual training sessions on Improving Police-Community Relations, and/or Understanding, Reporting and Preventing Hate Crimes. These were the themes of our annual police chief training sessions, which we sponsored for about four years, and through Jane's friendly banter with the chiefs, led to replication of these training sessions in cities throughout Minnesota.

We are indeed indebted to Jane for a lifetime of commitment to civil and human rights, and for the important work she did for the League during so many years.

*Mort Ryweck*

## Spotlight on Commissions

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### **Plymouth**

Members attended numerous workshops, seminars and trainings to broaden the commissioners' perspective and understanding. A grant was written and approved to promote relationship and understanding between the Human Rights Commissioners, Wayzata schoolteachers and students. The event is scheduled in March during a professional development day with the Wayzata schools. Plymouth was one of five Human Rights Commissions granted funding to increase participation and embracement of human rights by fostering stronger, engaged communities that are knowledgeable, able to identify future opportunities to collaborate and increase the commissions' ability to engage community in public discourse of human rights issues. Plymouth Commissioners contacted all the qualifying schools in the community to promote the LMHRS essay contest. Increased representation was the result of this effort. Plymouth was host to the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commission in January.

Ada Alden -Chair

### **Eden Prairie**

September was designated as "Hispanic Heritage" Month. A display at Cub foods, cooking demonstrations and an Aztec Ceremonial Dance at the public library provided a variety of experiences for the community.

(continued on page 6)

Moving Toward Thankfulness Campaign focused on educating people about other cultures, via the things all cultures have in common, in this case we focused on religion. Three faith groups (Muslim, Judaism and Hindu) were asked to participate in writing articles that explained the foundations of their beliefs for the Eden Prairie News. The articles appeared in three consecutive editions of the Eden Prairie News. In the weeks following the newspaper articles, the HRDC collaborated with the Eden Prairie Community Education department to offer bus tours to a Mosque, a Synagogue and a Temple.

Molly Kouvimaki – Staff Liaison

### **St. Louis Park**

An ongoing project for the HRC has been to examine the Diversity section of Vision St. Louis Park and develop goals/recommendations for actions. The Diversity Lens, created with input from the HRC and city staff, is now available in magnet form and will be distributed to city staff to use as a tool to incorporate diversity into all aspects of city work. In addition, the HRC will distribute the Diversity Lens at future events in 2009.

The HRC followed the 2007 Film Series with two films in 2008. “Our House” was the November film and is a groundbreaking documentary that explores what it's like to grow up with gay or lesbian parents. Following the film, a St. Louis Park father and son led a discussion for filmgoers. One of the messages we heard over and over from people attending the film is how lucky residents of St. Louis Park are to live in a community that is so welcoming of all families. The speaker answered questions and shared some of his son’s experiences as the son of two fathers. The success of this event was attributed to film topic and the extra outreach and promotion of this film.

Marney Olson -Community Liaison

### **Hopkins**

The Hopkins Human Rights Commission completed a Darfur Genocide Resolution with the University of Minnesota and the Hopkins City Council. Police Chief Reid was the recipient of the LMHR award. In March a library project with grades 2 – 4 will focus on reading books, sharing DVDs and completing art projects. Meetings with the Hopkins School Board and the City Council maintain a high visibility for the Hopkins Human Rights Commission. Presentations to 8<sup>th</sup> graders with descriptive packets from the LMHRC promoted the essay contest. In February a celebration for the participant families and students and staff will be held at the Hopkins Center for the Arts.

Judy Reinehr, Chair

### **Red Wing**

The Red Wing HRC sponsored a celebration of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Red Wing. Local speakers, as well as musical groups from the community and musical and theatrical presentations by MCCF residents were part of the program.

In the first part of March the Red Wing HRC will be co-sponsoring a community forum focusing on racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Other sponsors include Red Wing Community Education, the League of Women Voters Red Wing, and the First District Bar Association. Speakers and panel members will include a First District Judge, a prosecutor from the Twin Cities (not me), and local court and law enforcement officials. POST and CLE credits are being applied for.

Larry Clark, HRC

(continued on page 7)

## **Edina**

The Edina Human Rights and Relations Commission took advantage of the generous grant from the MDHR. Jennifer Buzzeelle was contacted to help with strategic planning. The first three hour meeting was October 27, 2008. Upon a request from Idelle Longman, a follow up session was held November 22, 2008. Both sessions were extremely helpful to the Commission.

Idelle Longman, HRC

## **Montgomery**

The Human Rights Commission teamed up with the Montgomery-Lonsdale School District to host a week long series of diversity events and activities in November for students in grades K-12. The community was also invited to participate one evening in a multi-cultural event.

### **Elementary and Middle School Activities:**

Classrooms had round robin discussions with foreign exchange students from Indonesia, China, Holland, Germany and the Dominican Republic. The topics of discussion were geared to illustrate the similarities and differences between the different cultures; and centered on family fun and activities, types of food, and what students like to do in their free time. Classrooms also participated in a poster contest by selecting a country, studying it, and designing a poster around what they learned. Posters were displayed at the Celebration of Nations event.

### **High School Activities:**

The foreign exchange students did a presentation for the high school students illustrating the similarities and differences between the cultures.

High school students participated in Mix-It-Up Day at lunch. Diners received a candy bar and sat with other students who received the same candy bar. Students had lunch and conversations with kids they typically don't sit by.

### **Celebration of Nations:**

This multi-cultural community event featured various entertainment, international food, informational booths and various cultural activities. Foreign college students from Carlton, St. Olaf and MN State University Mankato managed the booths, did presentations and activities, and shared their culture with the community and students. Representing various countries, dancers performed national dances.

A large 4x8 foot rendering of the world was displayed on a wall. Everyone was encouraged to participate by stringing a strand of colorful yarn from Montgomery, MN to somewhere else in the world where they knew someone. The goal was to illustrate how small our world actually is.

The Celebration of Nations and other student activities were a tremendous success. The partnership between the city and the school district to provide the opportunities for students and community members to learn about other cultures will continue in 2009.

Renee Southworth, Liaison

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## **Roseville**

Last October the Human Rights Commission partnered with the Greater Twin Cities United Way to host a Cultural Complementarity Discussion. Participants discussed ways to make Roseville a more welcoming community. More than 100 participants attended the three hour evening event. Northwestern College, Roseville Area School District 623, Roseville Rotary, Roseville Visitors Association, JC Penney and the Minnesota Department of Human Rights sponsored the event. Participants committed to continuing to work together to be good neighbors.

Thelma McKenzie, HRC

## **Crystal, Golden Valley, New Hope, Robbinsdale and Plymouth**

These 5 Human Rights Commissions have formed a Collaborative Group to work on Capacity Building through use of a Bremer Grant. Melodie Hanson of the New Hope HRC was the Lead writer of the grant with the Crystal HRC framing the needs. Representatives of the partnering HRCs have met to plan. The last meeting drew an expanded group of eighteen in January.

The goal stated in part: Increase Commission capacity to effectively and proactively work with the broader community in the understanding, protection and advancement of human rights. Commission members will gain knowledge of different cultures working and living within our communities.

Four of these five communities are first ring suburbs and all five have seen rapid growth in diversity in their cities. Grant funds will be used to in part strengthen the HR Commissioners' skills and leadership capabilities through increasing knowledge base and understanding the various cultures and groups within the communities and improving capacity to communicate and engage with various cultures.

### **LMHRC Information**

(763) 535-1051

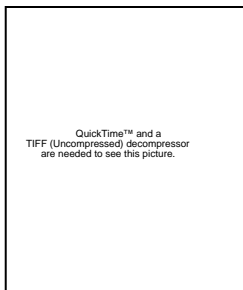
(answering machine only)

[www.leagueofmnhumanrights.org](http://www.leagueofmnhumanrights.org)

By March 20<sup>th</sup> send Commission news and electronic photos  
for April edition of Together to

Marion Helland, Editor

[marionhelland@comcast.net](mailto:marionhelland@comcast.net)



**Mario Hernandez** serves as a bridge from the Minnesota Department of Human Rights. His monthly reports to the League Board contain valuable

information on the state of Human Rights in Minnesota. He began his work last year as head of Legislative and Community Affairs at MDHR. He brings a wealth of management and public policy experience along with strong ties to immigrant communities. From 2005 to 2007 he served as Executive Director of La Escuelita, an organization that provides programs for Latino youth. In 2007 he was selected as “Community Educator of the Year” by the newspaper La Prensa de Minnesota. In 2005 he was selected as one of “25 on the Rise” by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota.

Examples of the information that Mario brings to the League Board meetings: Twice a year the MDHR submits its semi-annual report to the Legislature summarizing the results of its investigation and resolution of human rights complaints. The documents that comprise the most recent report, detailing the Department’s activities during the period of January 1, 2008 to June 30, 2008, can be downloaded here:

[http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/about\\_leg\\_reports.html](http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/about_leg_reports.html)

Local Human Rights Commissions Project Grants: The next deadline for the grant program is March 31, 2009. Grants will still focus on capacity building. A new grant announcement has been sent to all city liaisons of the local human rights commissions. If you’d like a copy of the grant announcement and accompanying grant form, send a request via email to [mario.hernandez@state.mn.us](mailto:mario.hernandez@state.mn.us)

## LEGISLATIVE

The department has put forth a housekeeping bill for 2009 to clarify some language in the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The bill has not yet been introduced and the bill language is not yet available. No other legislative initiatives are being initiated in 2009.

Bills introduced that if passed, as introduced, would affect the Minnesota Human Rights Act: S.F. 120 – Marriage and Family Protection Act; gender-neutral marriage provisions Bill would remove Minn. Stat. § 363A.27, (4).

## MINNESOTA STATE LEGISLATURE

**HOME PAGE:** Starting point for looking up bills, legislators, House and Senate committee schedules, fiscal and policy related reports, offices within the Legislature and many other items — <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/>

### 150 years of Human Rights in Minnesota

Video: This video is available on website at [http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/video\\_esq.html](http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/video_esq.html). The department still has copies of the video to distribute. For a free copy of the DVD, please contact Mario at [mario.hernandez@state.mn.us](mailto:mario.hernandez@state.mn.us) or 651-297-5091.

Upcoming items:

- Pushed Aside – another video in our series of educational products. This video focuses on age discrimination and is produced in the same format as our other education videos available on our web site.
- Community Forms and Training Showcases — These two series of outreach events will begin once again in early spring. Cities for these events have not yet been finalized. If your city is chosen, expect your local HRC to receive a call from MDHR requesting its collaboration.

## **Silence Allows Crimes of Hate and Bias**

Recently I participated in a rally and a march with a clearly defined purpose: We came together in support of a beautiful woman who was brutally attacked and left unconscious on the street at night. How could this happen in Minneapolis? Was it because this young woman was female, perhaps a woman of color, or a woman of color who is a lesbian?

And how do we respond to violent acts of hate and bias? It's a collective problem that requires a massive community response. Whatever our belief system, hatred must not be tolerated. We must add our voices in support of the rule of law. Speak out to your neighbors, your community, friends and family members, against any act of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender, creed, religion, national origin, marital status, disability, public assistance, age. Discrimination against anyone for these reasons is against the Minnesota Human Rights Act. Silence legitimizes violence stemming from this kind of hate and bias.

Most recently Minneapolis was recognized among the country's top 10 cities to raise a family (Best Life magazine) while hate crimes reported against the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in Minnesota more than doubled in 2007 from 2006 (Outfront Minnesota). Such crimes diminish and endanger us all. We must take action.

I serve as Commissioner with the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission and Vice President of the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions. Both the Commission and the League promote, advocate and educate around civil and human rights under the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances and the Minnesota Human Rights Act. These provisions include protection under the law. We must educate, inform and prevent such circumstances from occurring within our communities. It takes one minute of our time to speak out against

hate and reduce overt bias and discrimination. In the words of Anne Frank: "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

Louisa Hext  
Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission  
Vice President, League of Minnesota  
Human Rights Commissions

This letter was sent to the Minneapolis Star Tribune in response to the news article stating that Minneapolis police are seeking two suspects who allegedly beat a woman in her Uptown neighborhood after verbally attacking her for being a lesbian.

League Board members serve on a number of committees that deal with human rights issues. Listed below are some of the tasks for the Bias/hate Crime Response Committee.

### *Bias/hate Crime Response Committee*

- Assemble pro-active, prevention ideas.
- Create a response plan for hate crimes and incidents.
- Assign responsibility for letter writing, phoning, visitation when a crime or incident is reported.
- Assist local HRCs to create and implement Bias/Hate Crimes Response and Prevention Plans.
- Review and inform key people about the League's REHaB plan (Reducing & Eliminating Hate Behavior).