



# SOUTH ORANGE | MAPLEWOOD COMMUNITY COALITION ON RACE

***Our Mission:*** To build and sustain a community that is racially, culturally, and socially integrated and truly inclusive, where there is equity and equality for all.

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## 2016 Annual Report

During 2016 we celebrated 20 years of work on intentional integration and true inclusion in the towns of South Orange and Maplewood—one of the most difficult years in our nation's recent history in terms of racial violence and during a campaign season that was marked by the most demeaning stereotypes. We always have seen our mission as critical and as an ongoing effort, but the events of 2016 gave a special urgency to our work.

While the Coalition's mission is right and good, make no mistake—this is risky work. It took vision to form the organization, and courage to lay claim to—not to mention act on—the belief that two towns could counter racism and build an integrated community in a racially segregated region, in a nation habituated to turning a blind eye to both a racist past and the possibility of an inclusive future. Nonetheless, we have remained committed to the Coalitions' key pro-integrative strategies:

- to promote dialogue and understanding on race-related issues
- to promote strong and sustained robust demand by all racial groups for housing in every area of our community
- to work toward a school district that is stably integrated overall, where students of all races are expected and encouraged to excel
- to encourage civic, governmental, business, and community organizations to be inclusive and value integration in policies, practices, programs and partnerships

We continue to stand by those strategies today, as we must in a nation where we are witness to the ongoing, debilitating, and sometimes deadly effects of racism and segregation. We promise to work consistently to help individuals and institutions value and appreciate racial and cultural differences, view diversity as a benefit, interact respectfully, and advocate for change whenever equity for all members of the community is at risk.

***We invite you to have a look at our 2016 highlights and find your place with us in the coming year.***



Community & State leaders join together to sing 'We Shall Overcome' at the 2016 MLK Observance.



2016 'Celebrating Integration' Honorees



2016 Civic Engagement Institute trainers and graduates

# 2016 Highlights...

**The 15th Annual MLK Observance & Volunteer Fair was a wonderful display of our towns' commitment to integration and inclusion.**

Over 500 people gathered at Congregation Beth El to be with fellow residents and to reflect on the message of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Michelle Miller, CBS News correspondent and South Orange resident, gave a passionate, heartfelt, and sober speech on the need to truly heed Dr. King's message: Dr. King reminds of us our responsibility to do, not just be." She praised the community even while acknowledging that even here, where we work so hard at building relationships across racial lines and try to be inclusive of all voices, people of color face racism. Everyone made this day a stirring reminder of all that we are here in South Orange and Maplewood and all that we have yet to do.

The Volunteer Fair followed the service. Over 20 local nonprofit and volunteer service organizations hosted tables where they met with attendees. Donations of canned goods, toiletries, glasses, and knitting supplies were collected for various charities as well.



## 3rd Annual Luminary Project Lights Up the Towns

Despite some very cold and windy weather, hundreds of families joined together in this effort to display our community's dedication to integration and inclusion. The luminary kits were put together by a wonderful group of volunteers—including kids and local Girl Scouts—under the leadership of South Orange resident Patricia Canning.

## Conversations on Race with Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum

Dr. Tatum, retired Spelman President, presented a moving speech on race in America to over 200 residents during the 16th annual Conversations on Race. After nearly 20 years since her first visit, Dr. Tatum reprised the topic based on her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* and conducted a Q&A session.

She reminded us that we are not living in a post-racial world, but rather in a 21st-century version of the Reconstruction era. Although there have been gains, there are reactionary forces among racist populations that are gaining ground and finding new leaders who echo their "silent hate." She reminded the audience that they have more power than they think to exercise leadership:

*"Everyone has a sphere of influence, such as family, friends, and colleagues," said Dr. Tatum. "Here's my charge to all of you: use your social network to take a stand, disrupt the cycle, and ask difficult questions. We are all part of a chain. We should set the example, knowing that others will follow."*

## Moving from Distress to Solutions

We convened a second gathering to join in conversation at Oheb Shalom Congregation after racist and anti-Semitic images were posted on social media by students. Our goal was to deal with the high degree of frustration in the community over the lack of progress and responsiveness when confronted with racist and anti-Semitic incidents and the ongoing need to learn how to talk about race and religion with deeper understanding and without fear.







## XRootsFest (*cross-roots fest*) Promoted Multicultural Exchange

XRootsFest presented a variety of music and dance from different cultures along with a field full of vendors. People were treated to acts like Segunda Quimbamba, Ecuadorian music from Ayazamana Cultural Center, Creations Dance Academy who performed classical Indian and Bollywood dance, the Usaama Dance Company who performed dance along with songs and drums, Rara Pa Nou, a group performing festival music from Haiti that celebrates freedom, Biwanko–Japanese drumming, and American as well as Irish Folk music.



## The Schools Committee

**Talking to Children about Race & The Construction of Race** These two workshops were led by Dr. Khyati Joshi to support teachers & parents in gaining anti-bias and social justice knowledge and strategies for multi-cultural education and parenting.

**SOMa Integrated Playgroup** Now in its 3rd year, the playgroup brings together children ages 6 months to 5 years and their parents/guardians in a relaxed, fun setting, monthly on Saturday mornings. Visit the Facebook group at SOMa Integrated Play Group for more information.

**Planning Ahead** Parents of middle school kids attended this hands-on workshop to learn about CHS graduation requirements, college expectations, the role of sports and extra-curriculars, plus important information about different course designations like AP, honors, and advanced honors.

**BOE Candidates Forum** Candidates offered their positions on vital issues for our schools and towns including the access and equity policy, the continuing minority achievement gap, and how to create true integration in our schools.

**15th Annual Preschool Open House** This event provides parents with the opportunity to learn about all the preschools options in and near our towns. Renee Joyce, Director of Montrose Early Childhood Center, gave a talk for parents on choosing an appropriate school for their children.

**New Teacher Orientation** Co-chairs Carol Barry-Austin and Sue Willis told new teachers about the Coalition and it's commitment to excellence & equity for all students. New staff were provided with a Coalition-led tour of the two towns so that they become better acquainted with all of SOMa.



## Coffee House Discussions

2016 saw the second year of these meet-ups where locals work on emerging topics and delve deeper into issues of concern. We began the year with a discussion about what sports & clubs are racially representative and which attract single groups and why.

Following the #Notinourtwtowns event in August, we held a discussion about policing in our towns. People shared their experiences and concerns about improving community relations with police. Action steps were developed for residents and police, including developing better relationships, understanding your rights and obligations, and dealing with profiling and implicit bias.

In December, Maplewood resident and journalist Topher Sanders started the conversation by sharing his New York Times Op-Ed piece, "*Only White People Said the Little Girl*". In the wake of post-election acts of overt racism in the nation, attendees shared ideas about how to talk about race at home with family, with children, and how to respond when confronted with racist comments—whether at home or in public.



## Celebrating Integration: Many Voices-One Community

At the annual dinner, we celebrated 20 years of intentional integration—all the programs, strategies, and events that have supported building an inclusive community where all people are welcome. We were pleased to have Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, Maplewood Mayor Vic DeLuca, and South Orange Village Trustee Walter Clarke to present the awards. We honored all the chairs of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Directors over the life of the organization for demonstrating their commitment and leadership to racial integration and inclusion. Pictured left are honorees Leila Gonzalez Sullivan, Fred Profeta, Barbara Heisler, Estelle Greenberg, Nancy Gagnier, Carol Barry-Austin, M. Sue Willis, Robert A. Marchman. Honorees not pictured are Marlon Brownlee, Robin Burns Saunders, Anthony Greene, & the late Chip Madsen.

**Integration through the Arts** supports creative, sustainable communities by using the arts to bring together people of different races and cultural backgrounds and to build authentic relationships across racial boundaries. Through a grant from the Essex County Local Arts Program, we sponsored 2 workshop series in 2016:

*My Story: SOMA's Diversity Captured in Two-Minute Shorts* in which participants learned how to create video vignettes about life and experiences in our diverse South Orange/Maplewood community using smart phones.

*The Shekere Maker Project*: participants created and learned to play the Shekere with Ahmondhylla Best (pictured right)—a West African gourd instrument and were invited to play the instruments that they created during the drumming circle activity at XRootsFest.



## Foundation, Community, & Corporate Support—Thank You!

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Township Of Maplewood  
Essex County Local Arts Grant  
Fraentzel Foundation  
Friends of Burgdorff Cultural Center  
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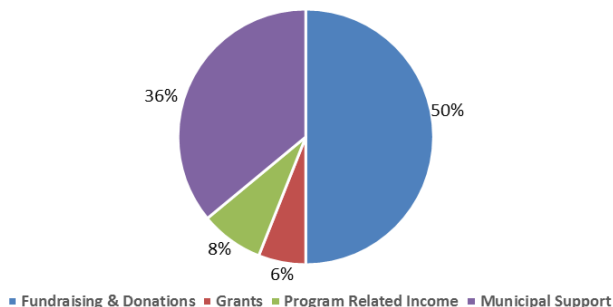
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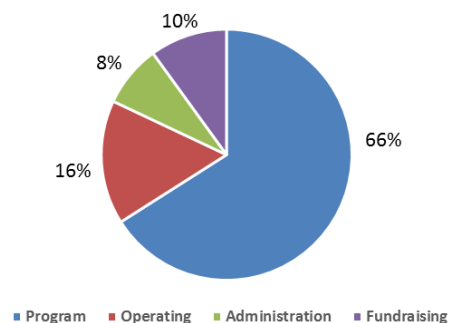
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**2016 Income Summary**  
Total Projected: \$143,975



**2016 Expense Summary**  
Total Projected \$143,312





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### Same Essential Mission, New Words

Racial Integration and true inclusion have been at the heart of our mission since its inception. Our Board adopted new wording that stays true to those core concepts:

**Mission:** To build and sustain a community that is racially, culturally and socially integrated and truly inclusive, where there is equity and equality for all.

**Vision:** We aspire to be a community that is a model for the nation in which people of different races, ethnic groups and backgrounds can interact, form friendships and participate fully in the community's economic, political, civic, educational and cultural life.

### 2016 SOMa Demographics Report

We looked at demographic trends in our towns to see if we could gain some insight into emerging trends in our demographics. We asked the following questions:

- What have SOMa's demographics looked like over the last 20 years? And where are we now?
- Are there observable trends that forecast our future demographic profile?
- What do these changes mean for our integration mission?

*For the full report, visit our website.*

### SOCO held its 46th Annual MLK Celebration at which

Dallas Jackson and Steve Latz received the Beloved Community Awards.

They have served local causes for decades. Dr. A. Zachary Yamba, President Emeritus of Essex County



Community College, was the keynote speaker. With quiet grace and passion, he described how critical community colleges are for so many young people.

### SOMa Residents Speak Out at #NotinourTwoTowns

**Event** about racial violence in the nation. This powerful event was led by Movement with a Purpose and the SOMa Clergy Association, along with the townships of South Orange and Maplewood and the Coalition on



Race, all under the banner of #NotinourTwoTowns. Below is the Pledge:

'We, the elected officials, clergy, law enforcement officers, business owners, civic organizations, students, and residents of South Orange & Maplewood pledge #Notinourtwtowns. We are committed to ensuring that there is no place for systemic racism in our towns, that no one is safe until everyone is safe. We commit to not judging others based on their physical appearances, and to facing and fixing local injustices whenever and wherever they exist because we also know that unresolved racism and injustice feed permissiveness and hopelessness which are breeding grounds for violence. We are committed to taking a stand against all forms of violence and do not affirm it under any circumstances. We recognize that while we are not all guilty, we are all responsible, and only together and united, can we ensure that bigotry, hate, and systemic racism has no place in South Orange or Maplewood—not in our two towns!'



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