



# SOUTH ORANGE | MAPLEWOOD COMMUNITY COALITION ON RACE

## ***Our Vision:***

*To achieve and sustain the benefits of a thriving, racially integrated, and truly inclusive community that serves as a model for the nation*

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## **2015 Annual Report**

We have faced quite a year of challenges as a nation when it comes to race relations, racial justice, and the work of integration. Just as we were coming to understand the deeply divisive effects of residential segregation in places like Ferguson and Baltimore, we were witness to the tragedy of the Charleston church murders. The need for inter-group understanding, for building meaningful relationships across racial lines, and for coming to terms with persistent forms of racism, was put in high relief.

***"We'll probably have to have a few uncomfortable conversations to sort of get things right, so everybody can walk and enjoy America as it's supposed to be enjoyed." Jamie Foxx***

You responded here where we live by attending a community vigil for the Charleston victims, coming to one of the best-attended **Conversations on Race** ever, meeting up in local coffee shops for **Coffee House Discussions** to talk about race, joining our first ever **Integrated Playgroup**, and participating in all sorts of community-building projects like the **Cultural Heritage Festival**, **Integration through the Arts** programs, the **Two Towns-Many Stories** discussions, and the **Martin Luther King, Jr., Observance & Volunteer Fair**.

It takes grassroots organizations like ours to create the broad cultural change that most effectively begins on the local level. We do this work here so that everybody can fully enjoy all the benefits of life in our towns and in the hopes, as Jamie Foxx says, that more places "get things right so everybody can walk and enjoy America."

***We invite you to have a look at our 2015 highlights and consider joining both the conversation and the action in the coming year.***



The children's choir performs at the *Two Towns In Harmony-The Remix* concert



Residents gather for our 1st Coffee House Discussion.



Celebrating Integration at the annual dinner!

# 2015 Highlights...

## We Honored Dr. King & Integration In Our Towns

The 2015 **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Observance** was a wonderful way to celebrate the legacy of Dr. King, our commitment to racial integration and inclusion, and an important reminder of the work that is left to be done. Over 600 people attended at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, including our local and county elected leaders, clergy, police and fire chiefs, and Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr.

Organized by the Coalition's *Interfaith Outreach Committee*, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Baha'i, and Ethical Culture leaders all played a role in the service. Keynote speaker Joseph Ford, a former United Methodist minister, has been a civil rights activist for his entire career. He spoke passionately as he recalled working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, his efforts to register African Americans to vote, and his experience marching with Dr. King across the bridge in Selma. He warned the audience that the memories were painful; he experienced the violence done to protesters as well as witnessing the fear felt by people fighting for the right to vote. In light of his personal experiences 50 years ago and the pain felt by so many in this difficult period in our nation, Mr. Ford made a moving call for attention to police/community relations at all levels.



## The Volunteer Fair

The annual Volunteer Fair followed the MLK service where attendees could participate in 'instant impact' activities like assembling toiletries for teens packages and creating books for the Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey organization. Donations were made to the MEND Food Pantry, Emily's Hats, and New Eyes for the Needy. Local service organizations also set up tables to encourage people to support their missions by volunteering. Over the weekend in other parts of the community, the Rotary sponsored a blood drive and the South Orange Library held a family archive project.

## Over 1400 Candles Shining In Our Towns

Residents joined in the Coalition's 2nd Annual Luminary Project this year with great enthusiasm! Front steps and walkways at homes across the two towns were lit up with luminaries as a sign of peace and solidarity on the night of Dr. King's national birthday recognition.



## Talking about Everyday Racism at *Conversations on Race*

This year's *Conversations on Race* was powerful! Prof. Michael Jeffries, a graduate of Columbia High School, traveled from Wellesley College to speak at our event. His focus on race, gender, politics, and identity in his writing and teaching made him supremely qualified to lead us. He knows our community both from within and from the vantage point of his impressive work on many of the issues that are related to our integration mission. His talk on micro-aggressions stimulated some meaningful and dynamic table discussions.

A common theme among the table discussions was that this type of bias hurts everyone—both the recipient and perpetrator. It is important to speak up and challenge these comments, to educate, and to look for allies. *Special thanks to Congregation Beth El for hosting this large community gathering!*

## Coffee House Discussions

Residents have asked for more opportunities to continue discussions from the *Conversations on Race* forums and to engage in more timely and less formal discussions of race-related issues with their neighbors.

In 2015 we launched a new opportunity to meet and chat about the issues on our minds that are related to the Coalition's mission of racial integration and true inclusion. Join the Facebook group, **SOMAcoffeehousediscussions**, to keep up-to-date on meetings and discussions.







## The Cultural Heritage Festival Celebrated Diversity

The Cultural Heritage Festival is an entertaining event that celebrates the many cultures of our beloved community. It showcases the beauty of the diverse ethnicities that make our towns such great places to live and work. We had a great line up of special talent for the second year in a row at Maplewood Memorial Park. Throughout the day people enjoyed a variety of dance and music and got to participate in hula, belly, and line dancing! The little kids especially enjoyed the Chinese Lion Dancers and also being invited on stage to do a little dancing along with the MC, Beatrice Carter. There were a variety of international food vendors along as well.

## The Schools Committee

### Integrated Playgroups

The SOMA Integrated Playgroup meets monthly on Saturday mornings at Le Parc Place, a preschool and children's enrichment center in Maplewood. Our goal is to bring together children ages 6 months to 5 years and their parents in a relaxed, fun setting. If you are interested in joining the group, join the Facebook group at SOMA Integrated Play Group

### Planning Ahead

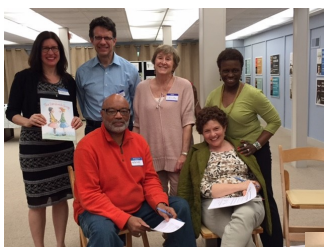
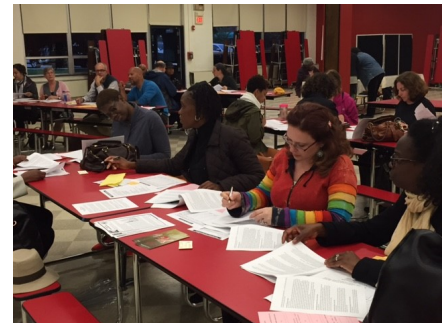
Parents of middle school kids attended this hands-on workshop run by volunteers Sheila Belt and Nancy Grant. Parents learned about CHS graduation requirements, state requirements, college expectations, the role of sports and other extra-curriculars, plus some important information about the different course designations like AP, honors, advanced honors, and more.

### BOE Candidates Forum

Members of the Schools Committee, on behalf of the South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race, developed a set of questions that were asked by a moderator. The questions focused on the relationship between school policies and integration in our schools. After each of the candidates addressed the questions, the audience was invited to ask their questions.

### The 14th Annual Preschool Open House

Over 80 parents and lots of toddlers attended this year. There are so many wonderful options in and near our towns—the open house provides a chance for parents and guardians to see many of them all at once. Renee Joyce, Director of Montrose Early Childhood Center, gave a talk for parents on choosing an appropriate school for their children. Thanks to Heather & Suki Realtors for sponsoring the event for the 2nd year!



## Two Towns, Many Stories—Community Reading for Adults & Kids!

We partnered with the local libraries and [words] Bookstore to select stories that consider racial and cultural differences. The discussions of Toni Morrison's *Recitatif* and Junot Diaz's *How to Date a Brown Girl (Black Girl, Yellow Girl or Halfie)* were powerful! Participants considered the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and gender, and related these ideas to their own lives and experiences here in our towns.

We learned a lot from the kids who attended the reading of *The Sandwich Swap*—the illustrated story by Queen Rania of Jordan Al Abdullah about two best friends whose friendship is challenged by their sandwich preferences. Kids love this story and they were willing to try some very interesting sandwich combinations! They also had a lot to offer on the concepts of acceptance and difference.

# 2015 Contributors: *Thank You for Your Support!*

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## Two Towns in Harmony-The Remix

This community concert included singing, dancing, and instrumental music that honored our towns' commitment to racial inclusion. It was an amazing tribute to the original Two Towns in Harmony concert from 2005 that featured a specially commissioned piece by composer Janet Albright. More than 100 participants from the "Two Towns" region combined forces to produce the free concerts at South Orange Middle School and chorus members reconvened to participate in the SO Symphony concert. Both programs featured excerpts from Ms. Albright's work, *An American Dilemma: A Place for All People*.

## Celebrating Integration: Unity in Diversity

Congratulations to **Marc H. Morial, Joan Lee, and Cantor Perry Fine** (pictured right) on receiving the 2015 Celebrating Integration Awards for their commitment to our mission and goals through their volunteer and professional work. Their work is at the heart of what we do to build an integrated community: market our towns as an inclusive community; provide social opportunities for people to forge relationships across racial barriers; train residents in volunteerism in order to increase civic engagement; and advocate for policy changes that effect systemic issues like diversity in hiring, cultural competency in community leadership, and racial representation in community participation.



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

Village of South Orange  
Township Of Maplewood  
Essex County Local Arts Grant Program  
First Baptist Church of South Orange  
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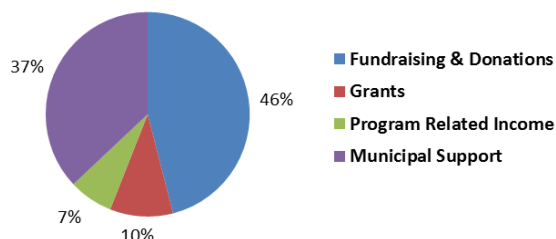
Ahava Felicidad Hair and Body  
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Ashley Market  
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Hart Roofing  
Hedwig Gruenwald Nursery School  
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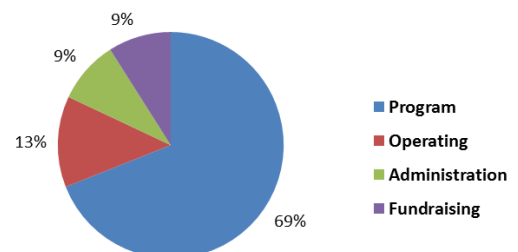
Jennifer Macafee  
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The Framing Mill  
The Strollers  
The Tenth Muse Gallery  
Town and Country Collision Service  
Vanessa Pollock  
Village Pizzeria  
West Village Clothing  
Words Bookstore

### 2015 Income Summary Total Projected \$141,560



### 2015 Expense Summary Total Projected \$136,675





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**Townships Adopt Resolutions about Community Racial & Social Justice Issues**

Our trustees asked town leaders to develop resolutions that would stand as community positions on racial equity following national responses to racial profiling, bias, and systemic forms of racism in the aftermath of Ferguson and Staten Island. These incidents reminded us of the critical need for the types of community action that the Coalition provides on an ongoing basis: programs that support an integration culture—that allow people to build relationships across racial and cultural divides; honest conversations about race; strategies for integrated schools with policies and practices that ensure equity for all students; and more.

We thank the South Orange Village Trustees and the Maplewood Township Committee for their thoughtful resolutions that acknowledge the commitment of our towns to be integrated and inclusive.

**The 45th South Orange Civic Organization MLK Celebration!**

SOCO honors the power of individual community members' ability to make real and lasting change in the area of social justice in our towns. The 2015 'Beloved Community' awardees were Marvin Johnson, Melissa Kopecky, and Kathleen Leventhal.



**Interfaith Vigil for the Slain Emanuel AME Church-goers**

Organized by the SOMA Clergy Council, we joined the vigil to hold up the conviction that intentional integration and true inclusion are part of the solution.



**8th Graders at SOMS Talk about Race with Faculty, CHS Students, & the Coalition**

They discussed everything from stereotypes, racial profiling, and white privilege, to the complications of racial and ethnic self-identity in an increasingly complicated world. Other topics included racial identity, interracial friendships, academic placements, the assumptions people make based on appearances, feelings of exclusion, and the benefits and drawbacks of living in a diverse community. The passion, understanding, and sophistication with which SOMA students consider these difficult topics was truly amazing!

**Creating Strong Neighborhoods**

Well-maintained homes increase the appeal of South Orange and Maplewood as great places to live for future and current residents of all races. We launched *The Home Maintenance Loan* to assist residents with repairs that improve the external attractiveness of their homes. The goal is to increase the desirability of entire neighborhoods by improving the appearance of individual properties. Qualifying home owners can borrow up to \$5000 to complete external home repairs. More information on loan eligibility as well as the application can be found on our website at [www.twotowns.org/neighborhoods/home-maintenance-loan-program/](http://www.twotowns.org/neighborhoods/home-maintenance-loan-program/).



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