

South Orange/Maplewood COMMUNITY COALITION *on Race*

nonprofit organization working for a community that is truly inclusive and racially integrated—free of segregation in housing patterns and community involvement.

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Dear Neighbors:

We are delighted to make available this 2003 Annual Report of the South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race. We are an organization, which aims to create in our two towns a community of choice for all people. We are intentionally conscious of race in order to move towards a world where, ultimately, race won't matter. We do this work in our beloved towns of Maplewood and South Orange using the resources and participation of hundreds of volunteers who work on committees and attend events that range from inspiring speeches by religious and civil rights leaders to social events and discussions of how best to present our unique towns to potential neighbors. We are attempting to create a *culture of integration* because we believe that racial diversity is not a catch phrase but a concrete value for our lifestyle and the education of our children.

We work primarily through committees: the 28 members of the Board of Trustees (including liaisons from the governing bodies of both South Orange and Maplewood) form the policy making body, and the daily work of the organization is done by a professional staff and through the volunteers in more than nine standing and special committees. These committees do everything from sharing the story of our community with the world at large to working towards closing the academic achievement gap by organizing a summer class to improve children's skills in mathematics.

Our marketing committee and professional publicists place ads for our community and articles that highlight the fascinating and unusual people and activities in our neighborhoods and schools. We have a touring committee that gives personalized tours to

potential buyers. In 2003, due in large part to increased demand generated by a 4/13/03 *New York Times* article, 74 tours were given, and our staff sent out 390 packets of information about our towns! One of our big stories that began in 2003 and will continue into 2004 and 2005 is our selection for Continental Harmony, a program that brings an American composer into residency in our towns to create original music that expresses the spirit of this community.

But this is only the beginning. Our Interfaith Outreach Committee arranges several wonderful events a year to pull people of all religions together in mutual respect, and reflections are offered from perspectives including Buddhist, Christian, Humanist, Jewish, and Muslim. We have a committee that works to make sure municipal boards have memberships including people of all races, and encourages our friendly neighborhoods to organize for socializing and problem solving. This committee in the past year answered calls for information about pre-schools from young families by once again co-sponsoring an evening on choosing a pre-school for your child. This committee is also home to a program of small group discussions called *Study Circles* that in 2003 brought together dozens of people to discuss the Academic Achievement Gap.

The Academic Achievement Gap is also an on-going concern of an active Schools Committee that has taken on monitoring the school district's efforts to make sure that all the children are getting an excellent and equitable education. The Schools Committee initiated a model program, *Math Frenzy* for rising sixth graders, and supported a special program for incoming high school freshman called *Bridge to Success*. It also worked with Coalition Vice-Chairman Wayne Eastman on a series of articles analyzing the meaning of standardized test scores

broken down by race.

The Coalition also has several vital nuts-and-bolts committees including one that collects statistics about the towns and evaluates the work of the Coalition itself. We have a committee for financial development and one to examine the ordinances of the towns to see how they can encourage continuing and stable integration. We also run the PRISM program that offers second mortgages to people who are buying homes in a neighborhood where their race is under represented.

The Community Coalition, then, takes as its area of responsibility an array of tasks to make our community become and stay stably integrated. We work hard to publicize our beautiful tree-lined streets, but we also take on knotty issues through community forums and intense discussion at the level of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee. When we look at our efforts and achievements over the past year, we are extremely proud of what we have done together—people of all races working towards embodying a powerful vision of a place in America where integration is truly a way of life.

In 2004 we will take time to again assess our progress and develop a longer-range plan for our future. We invite you to participate in this important effort. We hope you will examine our report and be inspired. If you have not yet attended one of our events, please do! We work hard; we grapple with issues— and we have a lot of fun together! Become a part of our Beloved Community.

Meredith Sue Willis
CHAIR

Barbara Heister Williams
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Community members exchange ideas at a Coalition forum



Two Towns, the play!



The community welcomed Juan Williams



Readers from all over our community participated in *Two Towns: One Book*



Our annual Realtor tour was a big hit!

Activities

The mission of the Community Coalition is to support a healthy integrated community. That goal drives everything we do in this organization. Residents regularly suggest truly wonderful ideas for activities and events, but before we make a move, we ask, "Does it support our mission of fostering integration?"

Sometimes the projects that the Coalition gets involved with are rather small. They happen quietly without much fanfare. But rest assured they do have an impact and they do meet our mission. Take for instance the *Math Frenzy* project, which took place at South Orange Middle School last summer. The program matched a group of 13 soon-to-be-6th graders with the legendary Ann Alexander, an extraordinarily gifted math teacher who retired from Jefferson Elementary School in 2000 after 33 years. Working with the help of a dedicated group of Coalition volunteers, Mrs. Alexander and her students joyfully sweated out their July afternoons. The kids kept up with a steady stream of numerical challenges, putting in over fifteen hours a week doing math in order to get off to a running start in middle school.

There is no question that we live in a unique, thriving community at a time like no other. It's different from any other place that we know of. South Orange and Maplewood are truly the towns to plant roots in if you are committed to living in a richly diverse community. And that by the way, is no longer a well-kept secret. Our marketing program continues to succeed: in 2003 there were many stories about our towns, which ran in the *New York Times* and the *Newark Star-Ledger*; in national magazines and on Internet sites, and were carried on the local news broadcasts and around the country via NPR. Interviewed for a story in the *Times* last spring, Natalie Thigpen, a South Orange resident and Coalition Vice Chair, probably said it best. "There are other communities where you can get all this. But then you say to yourself, I would also like to live in a community that's more about what this country is coming to look like."

But we are aware that it is not enough to simply live in an integrated community. In order for our towns to really work, people need to share common experiences. Toward this end, the Coalition sponsors special events and programs throughout the year that bring together people who don't ordinarily connect with each other. These gatherings provide a way for neighbors to meet, to learn and talk openly about the issues we all face as a community in the context of race. Sometimes it's our schools, or our faith

communities, or the pro-integrative culture we seek to foster.

In 2003, residents and guests from neighboring towns participated in the following discussions and activities:

- ◆ *The 2nd Annual Martin Luther King Celebration: A Time for Reflection and Service*
- ◆ *Neighborhood Associations Workshop: Starting New Associations*
- ◆ *Planning Ahead: A Workshop for Middle School Parents*
- ◆ *Math Frenzy, a model program for rising 6th graders*
- ◆ *The 4th Annual Eve of Independence "Celebration of Vision"*
- ◆ *Bridge for Success, a summer transition program for incoming high school freshman*
- ◆ *Community Coalition Month's All Committee Meeting*
- ◆ *3rd Annual Realtors Tour*
- ◆ *Preschool Open House including a Kindergarten Readiness program*
- ◆ *Achievement Gap ABCs*

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

In 2003, we saw seeds long planted take root. Our returning programs and partnerships continued to build momentum, while exciting new endeavors began to blossom.

TWO TOWNS STUDY CIRCLES: EXAMINING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

A joint effort between the Adult School and the Coalition, the Two Towns Study Circles Program expanded its focus with a series looking into the academic achievement gap. More than 60 residents, teachers and students met in small groups over a six-week period to talk candidly about their experiences and concerns regarding the racial divide that exists between black and Hispanic students and their white and Asian peers in terms of school success. The round of study circles wrapped up with an action forum, in which all the groups came together to map out real plans for closing the achievement gap. The ongoing process of improvement moves us into the New Year and beyond with concrete steps to take and recommendations to put in place.

CAUCASIA GETS PEOPLE READING, TALKING

In 2002 the Coalition introduced residents to *Two Towns: One Book*—New Jersey's 1st ever community-wide book read.

Following on the success we had with Colson Whitehead's novel, *John Henry Days*, the Coalition, in partnership with our local libraries and Seton Hall University, offered residents *Caucasia*, Danzy Senna's critically-acclaimed debut novel. A spirited coming-of-age family saga set in Boston, the book brought people together at different places around our towns. There were salon-style discussions at NetNomads in Maplewood and the Dancing Goat in South Orange. Librarians at Columbia High School offered lunchtime discussions for students. The public libraries hosted a round of book discussions, and Seton Hall welcomed the author for an evening reading, discussion and reception. *The News Record* helped spread the word by running photographs of people reading *Caucasia* all over the towns.

IN OUR FAMILY GETS LOCAL SHOWING

Building on *Caucasia's* theme of family diversity, the Coalition joined with community volunteers to bring a touring photo-text exhibit to our community. *In Our Family* celebrated families of every size, shape, and combination. In addition to an exhibit at CHS and the district office, the public was invited to a forum with the exhibit's founders on the issues raised by the striking black and white family portraits.

TWO TOWNS: A PLAY

Socrates once said, "the unexamined life is not worth living." The Coalition took that adage one step further by asking a group of residents to examine life vis-à-vis race right here in our community. The words of about 40 people shaped the script of a new play capturing a candid view of what it's really like to live in South Orange and Maplewood. A roster of local luminaries from the theater world took part in a public reading of *Two Towns* at Seton Hall University in June. With funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, this portrait of racial identity—a work in progress—continues to evolve and incorporate the thoughts and words of many of our neighbors.

NEW MUSIC INSPIRED BY OUR TOWNS

Music bridges a community by bringing people from all different walks of life together. Last fall, we were honored to be selected for the prestigious *Continental Harmony* grant from the American

Composers Forum. Our towns were among just six communities selected for this project in 2003. Funding from the American Composers grant will allow our community to host Janet Albright, a composer-in-residence who will work with local musicians of all ages to create an original musical suite inspired by the community, its culture, history, and people. The project culminates with the debut of the locally inspired score on July 3rd, 2005.

ON THE WEB

The Coalition's web site serves as a source of information for people thinking of moving to our area and for current residents alike. Our site www.twotowns.org hosts a Coalition event calendar, the Artist's Network Calendar, volunteer sign up, pledge page, archives of Coalition newsletters, and reports on current Coalition initiatives and successes. Averaging over 1800 unique visits (over 20,000 hits!) per month, the web site also gives prospective neighbors a glimpse into life in our towns and answers many questions they have about our schools, parks, services and cultural life. Visitors can request an information packet on South Orange/Maplewood and sign up for a neighborhood tour. Links to the Coalition web site are welcomed.

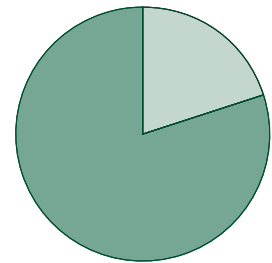
COMMITTEES

Committees comprised of volunteers handle most of the work of our many initiatives. Committee membership is open to anyone in the community willing to work on projects and initiatives, which support our mission. Full descriptions of our committees are posted on our website in the "Resident's Corner." Over 175 volunteers served on one or more Coalition committees or worked on special events in 2003. Using the Independent Sector's estimated value of volunteer time, based on US Bureau of Labor Statistics data, volunteers donated more than \$110,000 worth of time working on Coalition projects and serving on the following committees:

- ◆ Promotions/Marketing
- ◆ Touring
- ◆ Finance and Development
- ◆ Schools
- ◆ Financial Incentives
- ◆ Ordinance Review
- ◆ Interfaith Outreach
- ◆ Monitoring/Evaluation/Research
- ◆ Neighborhood Associations/Civic Life

Expense Summary

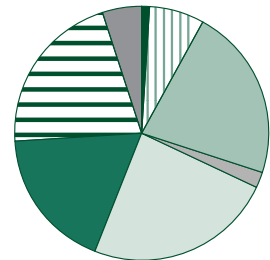
- Program Expenses—80%
- Operating Expenses—20%



TOTAL \$152,433

Income Summary

- Corporate—1%
- State/Federal Grants—7%
- Foundation—22%
- Fundraising—2%
- Private Gift—24%
- Township of Maplewood—18%
- Village of South Orange—21%
- Other income—5%



TOTAL \$163,582

A copy of our audited financial statements will be available for inspection and on file with the Town Clerks in early spring.

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Robert and Buena Chilstrom, Rose Flanagan, David R. and Katherine M. Flaxman, Donald and Crystal Mullins, Francis and Nonie Murphy, Fred and Susan Profeta, Edward and Nancy Stuart

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