

CELEBRATE commUNITY Statement

The CELEBRATE commUNITY event sponsored by United for Diversity is scheduled for February 20, 2010. It will be an exciting day of cultural immersion. The focus of the day will be for families and children, although adults will also have activities to awaken them to the benefit and pleasure of interacting with those of other cultures. A variety of ethnic foods will be served without charge from noon to 3 P.M. Many barrier breaking games, crafts and activities will continue throughout the day, to make the message personal and effective. Being shoulder to shoulder and eye to eye will result in a long lived positive experience for all who participate.

Inspiring Flag Ceremony and Diverse Music and Dance

The event will begin with the inspiring Flag Ceremony and welcomes from the Native American Elders and our City and County officials. At this time we have commitments from about 32 different ethnic groups to host booths. In addition, we will have booths of other agencies, religions and clubs who are planning exhibits to educate or inform the attendees of the multicultural opportunities they offer.

Arrangements have been made with eleven different venues to demonstrate the universal language of music and dance from many diverse cultures and lifestyles in our community. The groups tentatively scheduled at this time include those representing Germany, Ireland, India, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Africa, Cajuns, Central America, Hmong and the Caribbean.

The professional excellence of the entertainment offered results in a more costly event. However, because of this excellence, we anticipate many in the community will attend who otherwise might not, and then enjoy and appreciate others of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. The activities and entertainment should show those who are new in our community that those who preceded them had an interesting and admirable history. This will also allow the established members of our community to learn and admire those who are new, and respect them for their individuality.

A practical solution to a current community problem

During the past two years, we have become aware that our community is not immune to prejudice and unpleasantness toward others who appear different. There have been embarrassing incidents of blatant racism. Many times even those who are accepting of different cultures and people who appear different are not sure exactly how to respond.

People in our community of predominately European background do not easily accept the new members who look, speak, and dress differently and whose traditions are different. The Hmong, African American, Hispanic and Asian people have discussed in diversity circles that they have often been made to feel uncomfortable and unaccepted. This may well have been due to lack of knowledge and therefore, unintentional. By our nature we often respond with fear to the unknown. Not only do the newcomers feel uncomfortable, but so do the community members as they are not sure of how to interact with the new members. This is an opportunity to inform those with misconceptions and educate those who are not aware.

With contact in non-threatening situations, where the food, music and traditions are enjoyed, trust and friendship can develop. Not only do the new members feel accepted, but the long time members of our community are enriched by learning of the other person's culture, persona and traditions. They too then become comfortable interacting with them in situations in the community.

An event such as CELEBRATE commUNITY brings all members of the community together in a nonthreatening situation where all can mingle, observe, interact and get to know each other. It is an opportunity to become educated about the many traditions of the original cultures that settled our community as well as to learn about and respect the newcomers.

Stimulate others to participate in problem solving

Booth Hosts of the 2008 event worked together to improve the 2009 event. Again this year they are proposing ideas that will improve the 2010 event. Three meetings were held with the booth hosts to finalize the plans incorporating their suggestions. They divided the work load among themselves, contacting all potential participants, by phone and later with an informational mailing. There were 25 different countries represented in 2009 and seven more who are interested in participating in 2010. They all expressed great enthusiasm for this annual event. While the focus is mainly on the varied cultures now in our community, we also have diversity representation with groups who are different due to their unique health, physical and mental issues. Service agencies who wished to educate the general population and especially our new minority members also are invited to have booths. There is no charge to Booth Hosts.

Promote volunteer involvement

Over 100 volunteers participated to assure that the 2009 CELEBRATE commUNITY event ran smoothly. Members of the community in addition to students from UW-Fond du Lac, Marian University and MPTC were involved. The Volunteer Center also provided valuable organizational assistance. The volunteers themselves represented diverse races and cultures. Working together broadened respect and trust. Each person who volunteered received a complimentary t-shirt to wear at the event to identify them as workers. Most also participated in the opening flag ceremony.

This event not only promotes the acceptance of people of all cultures, but educates and maintains the pride of the new generations who are becoming further and further distanced from their heritage because of the nature of our society. Both the new members and the established members of our community will be able to learn about, admire and accept each other. This is a way for DIVERSITY to become UNITY.