

OU professors, area leaders discuss diversity issues

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Oakland University professors Shea Howell and Kevin Elzly, who led a diversity conference Oct. 25-26 in Farmington, say they put the word "minority" in quotation marks when they deliver their lectures.

"It is pejorative and untrue," Howell said. At any given time any person can fit the minority label, which the two facilitators consider having negative connotations.

As facilitators for the Detroit-based National Conference for Community and Justice, which will jointly sponsor the yearlong effort with the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Council, they want to make the Farmington area a model of diversity in metro-Detroit.

Globally, there are more people of African descent than most people know, Howell said. "The city of San Diego dropped the minority word from every official policy," she said.

The more than 120 conference volunteers talked about some community tensions.

Those tensions began years ago in many growth communities. "The biggest tensions are farmers who sold their land and sold it to wealthier folk who came into the area," Howell

said.

At an unrelated conference about two weeks ago, motivational speaker Chad Foster told a group sitting in the same room at the Farmington Training Center that it's not unusual for people to change careers eight times in their lifetime. That's careers, not different jobs within a career.

People move in and out of areas which have global companies.

The Farmington community has an image of welcoming diversity and doesn't have the image of not welcoming diversity like other communities do, said resident Mark Steckloff.

"Tensions exist when prospective buyers go to a house and see the neighbors who are already living there looking at them with suspicion or doubt," said Farmington Hills City Manager Steve Brock.

Sometimes people feel a lack of connection with others in a diversity community and Brock often wonders how he can get them to interact with city government.

There's a variety of tensions, members said.

"One parenting strain is when you speak one language and the parent of a young child's friend speaks a different language and you can't communicate, particularly with teenagers," said Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob

Maxfield. "It's a frustration."

There's also the tension of silence even though there's many community forums and plenty of ways for people to talk to each other, he said.

"There's too many people in the community who have chosen to handle it by simply shutting up and leaving," Maxfield said. "It's I don't like what I see, I'm out of here."

There's a huge gap of what's seen and done in terms of diversity, said Samir Haddad, director of bilingual education for the Farmington Public School District.

With more diversity, there's a broader range of what can be misunderstood, said the Rev. Ben Bohnsack of Nardin Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills.

The attack on Sept. 11, 2001, created tension in the community, said Farmington Mayor Jim Mitchell.

Sue Zurvalce, Farmington Schools assistant superintendent for staff and community services, mentioned broader economic diversity and the tensions and pressures high school students feel to have expensive cars and vacations. "If you come from a family without wealth, there are more tensions created that way, too," Zurvalce said.

Jim Hall, co-chair of the MCMR, began by saying he doesn't want to lose any friends or

alienate anyone with his comments. He feels there is a positive tension which Martin Luther King called "creative tension."

In Hall's position at MCMR and interaction with police, schools and city government, he's asked officials from each group about what they are doing with their staffs, what they were doing with their training.

"How many minority members do you have? What are your plans," are Hall's questions.

Hall sometimes felt out of place asking these questions. "But, that's a necessary kind of endeavor I had to do, to make people at least a little uncomfortable, to reflect on what I'm doing is what I'm here for."

Howell said she formerly worked with the city of Southfield on open housing issues. "At that time they were experiencing something called white flight," Howell said. "Does anybody know what percentage of people of color have to move into a neighborhood in order for whites to feel they are in a minority?"

Eleven to 14 percent, Howell said. "Our perception is very slippery," she said. "People who identify as white, say, (gasp) I'm a minority, I'm out of here." That's when you get wholesale flight from a neighborhood.

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MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Acro hires Hills man

Acro Service Corp. (Acro) is pleased to announce the hiring of Kishan Nair as Manager, Corporate Services. Ron Shahani, Acro's Founder and President, made the announcement.

Nair is responsible for government marketing, proposal coordination, industry research and analysis, subcontractor management, public relations and special assignments. Nair

will be based at the company's world headquarters in Livonia.

Nair earned his bachelor's degree from the Regional Engineering College in Nagpur, India. In 2002, he earned a MBA from Columbia Business School, Columbia University, New York, New York. He currently resides in Farmington Hills.

Founded in 1982, Livonia, Michigan-based Acro Service Corp. (Acro) provides collabora-

tive engineering, information technology and human capital management services to the world's leading organizations, including Fortune 500 companies and government entities. Acro expands the capabilities of its clients through technology consulting services, process and project outsourcing, managed human capital programs and staff augmentation. Acro (www.acrocorp.com) has more than 25 offices worldwide.

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Like many local charities, the Farmington Hills/Farmington Community Foundation for Children, Youth and Families took a hit after Sept. 11, 2001.

As the foundation prepares for its annual Cornucopia Ball, scheduled for 6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 9, at the Bosch Corporation, organizers hope that people will start thinking about giving locally again.

Highlights of this eighth annual Cornucopia Ball include:

■ Silent auction and cocktail

■ Strolling dinner

■ Live auction

■ Entertainment by Sheila Landis and Top Drawer

■ Celebrity guests Diann Lewis, WXYZ Channel 7;

Harry Hairston, WKBD Channel 50 and Paul Gross,

WDIV Channel 4.

Suggested attire is chic/elegant.

Robert Heinrich, foundation treasurer, said last year's Cornucopia Ball was fairly disappointing from a fund-raising standpoint, raising only \$95,000.

"It's crucial that this be a successful event," Heinrich said.

After Sept. 11, 2001, many donors began directing their money to New York-based charities instead of local ones.

The seven-year-old foundation has a \$30,000 endowment from which it spends only the interest earnings.

"In addition to being a fundraiser, the event helps raise community awareness and speaks to (the foundation's) purpose in the community," Heinrich said.

The foundation has contacted several large business donors about making five-year donations. Primary beneficiaries of the ball's proceeds

include:

■ The After School Program for Youth (ages) 11-15

■ IABES - Farmington

Families in Action

■ GRIP - Students and

Parents Together.

■ Multicultural / Multiracial

Community Council

■ YMCA Summer Camp

Scholarships

All donations to the nonprofit

foundation are tax

deductible. All contributions

and ball proceeds will be

assigned to the foundation's

general fund unless designated

for a specific community pro-

gram.

The Bosch Corporation is

located on Hills Tech Drive,

east of Halsted and south of 12

Mile. Reservations for \$150 per

person may be made by calling

(248) 345-9090.

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POLICE CALLS

A 77-year-old resident who resides in the south end of the Farmington, received an ordinance violation Oct. 15 for discharging a BB gun in the city and cruelty to animals.

Police responded to a complaint about 5 p.m. that the man discharged about 1,000 BB gun rounds throughout the day as he shot at birds.

The person making the complaint said the BB bullets hit a garage, wheelbarrow and an area where he walked. He also

found a dove with a wounded stomach.

When police arrived at the elderly man's home, they confiscated his BB gun which he withdrew from a box near his chair. He told police he only discharged an empty gun to scare away pigeons. The man said he didn't shoot BBs and didn't shoot the dove, the police report said.

The man told police he sets out large quantities of food for the birds and only tries to scare

away the pigeons eating the other birds' food.

Larceny

The owner of a 2000 Plymouth Prowler said someone took four chrome rims, four Goodyear run flat tires and four factory center caps from his vehicle parked on Manor Court Oct. 15.

Compiled by Sue Buck from reports on file at the Farmington Police Department.

Cornucopia Ball planned for Nov. 9

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