

# Speaker stresses the value of cultural differences

By LARRY O'CONNOR  
Staff Writer

When everyone embraces cultural diversity, it makes a world of difference.

Such is the theme of an ongoing workshop presented by the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council.

"On March 10 at the Botsford Inn, community leaders and residents alike gathered to explore the context of cultural and ethnic diversity.

The workshop was the second in a two-part series.

"I don't like to call it a melting pot," said Margot Lineberger, an African American resident of Farmington Hills. "I prefer to call it a stir fry. A stir fry still maintains its distinctive flavor."

Lineberger summed up the views expressed by Richard Lobenthal, who was the guest speaker.

Lobenthal is a member of the Anti-Defamation League and a consultant for Intergroup Relationships. He spoke of the need to acknowledge differences in culture and race and not ignore them.

To do otherwise creates more problems, he said.

"If you really want to treat everyone equal, that's good," Lobenthal said. "We also want to be color blind and that's bad, because we then refuse to acknowledge the differences we have."

There's a proper and an improper way to do that, according to Lobenthal. To illustrate his point, he made the statement: "You people . . ." What's wrong with that? he asked.

Audience members responded, saying the term is offensive. As a result, Lobenthal was put on the defensive.

"You can call me stupid; that will make me defensive," he said.

"You can call me racist and that will end it (the conversation). How do you educate me?" he asked.

Lobenthal said people of divergent cultures have to go beyond accuser and defendant roles. They must be able to negotiate their cultural differences.

"If you're not willing to negotiate cultural differences, you're saying, 'It's my culture; do it my way,'" Lobenthal said. "What you're saying is, 'You're not welcomed here.'"

Lobenthal added racism must be confronted by all people and "not leaving it up to the victim to defend themselves against discrimination."

Dialogue was opened up prior to Lobenthal's discussion, though. People of different races and backgrounds sat together and discussed issues openly.

Dr. Darlene Russell, a principal at Warner Middle School, said

she plans to have an exchange involving members of the school's choir with a middle school in Detroit.

An assignment for each person from the previous meeting was to scan situations involving race and culture.

"There's a real barrier because people are afraid they're going to use politically incorrect language," said the Rev. Mark Sommers, who is a pastor at North Farmington Community Church.

Another woman expressed exasperation with what she sees as blatant racism. She said her family received a warm welcome from another resident in her Farmington Hills neighborhood when they moved in.

"I thought, 'This is wonderful,'" said the woman, who is an African American. "She was the last person who extended herself to us in the community."



Making points: Richard Lobenthal, a consultant for Intergroup Relations, speaks at the Botsford Inn.

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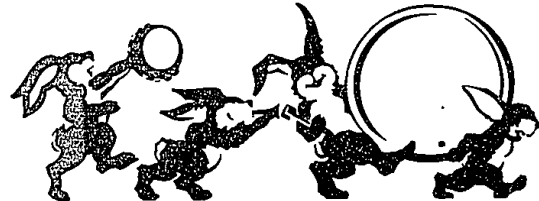


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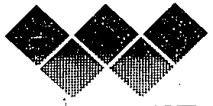
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