

LOCAL NEWS

Tolerance summit draws 200 to Port Richmond HS

Achievements by youths stand in marked contrast to last summer's unrest

By KIAWANA RICH
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Port Richmond put the world on notice last night: It's a community of hard-working, decent people who want nothing more than to live in harmony, and who refuse to let others define them.

That was the preeminent message during last night's eighth edition of the "Staten Island Solution Making Summit: From Bias Crimes to Tolerance and Trust," which was held inside Port Richmond High School.

More than 200 people — including a large contingent of youth — showed up last night, likely the largest summit so far.

And the crowd was diverse as well as unified. African Americans, Hispanics, Mexicans, whites, Asians and others were all part of the event. They sat together, talked together and feasted



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/BILL LYONS

Students from Wagner College, left, make a presentation during the Youth Raising Their Voices; Creating a New Generation of Activists at the eighth annual Staten Island Solution Making Summit presented by Communities United for Respect and Trust at Port Richmond High School.

together on a first-rate dinner created by students in the school's culinary program, said Principal Tim Gannon. And many cheered the triumphs of the Girls'

Cross Country track team.

"We wanted to make sure our guests saw the real youth of Port Richmond," said Gannon. "There are certain things in the media that don't

reflect 99 percent of the kids here. The kids are saying: This is who we are."

The achievements should go a long way toward tempering the disturbing inci-

dents that occurred this past summer, namely bias attacks against Mexicans and members of the LGBT community.

"The Staten Island community had become so fractured, so divided, so intolerant, that all types of biased attacks plagued Staten Island and Port Richmond and wound up gaining national attention," said keynote speaker and North Shore City Councilwoman Debi Rose, who noted that the crimes partially defined her year as the Island's first black elected official — and exposed the strained relations between new immigrants and established communities, and the marginalization of the LGBT community.

If there's a silver lining, she said, it's that many on the Island have worked hard to make a difference. And, she told the audience, we all must become "agents of change."

The summit was sponsored by the Advance and Communities United for Respect and Trust (CURT), with many other local groups involved, most notably in the variety of evening work-

shops, which focused on leadership, social justice, immigrants, homophobia and youth.

"I think we broke the barrier to involve ordinary Staten Islanders in the struggle to achieving human rights for all of us," said the Rev. Terry Troia, executive director of Project Hospitality.

Attendees like Juan Sosa, 16, of Port Richmond, were happy to be present. "We are trying to make change and we hope people will see you can make things different."

Port Richmond twins Rosabla and Sarai Flores, 11, said they were inspired by Ms. Rose and hope one day to fight for equality and justice.

The summit kicked off the Hate Crime Prevention Interfaith Weekend, which continues today with a breakfast hosted by City Council Speaker Christine Quinn.

Other speakers and attendees included Ed Josey, president of the Island NAACP; the Rev. Dr. Victor Brown, pastor of Mount Sinai United Christian Church, Tompkinsville, and Derek Slaughter, New York City Commission on Human Rights.