



Staten Island Advance

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At Port Richmond High School summit, tolerance gets pride of place

On Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2011, the Staten Island Advance ran the following story on the 9th annual anti-bias summit at Port Richmond High School, which included a brief mention of Wagner College's participation. Patrick Dutton, Robyn Levy and 12 other members of LC-20, "Power, Prejudice and Change: From Community-Building to Nation-Building," taught by professors Lori Weintrob and Jason Fitzgerald — along with several PRHS students — moderated a session on bias on the North Shore and the role of youth mentors.

Youth were challenged to be agents of change at the ninth annual Islandwide conference on community organizing across barriers of race, class, ethnicity and faith traditions, held last night at Port Richmond High School.

“We’ve chosen Port Richmond High School for the second year in a row because so much of the violence and discrimination that occurs on the streets of the Island emanates from young people,” said the Rev. Terry Troia of Project Hospitality, a sponsor.

Eye Openers Youth Against Violence “put extraordinary effort on reaching out to high school students to attend, targeting workshops to issues that youth want and need to hear about” and led a session in collaboration with Wagner College, Rev. Troia said.

Topics at workshops — which also were hosted by the NAACP, Building Bridges Coalition of Staten Island, Staten Island University Hospital and Next Level Men’s Group — included student health, the criminal justice system, cyber-bullying, interfaith efforts to build community, and dealing with an uncertain economy. The “Bridging the Gap: Learning From Each Other” theme summit was attended by more than 200 people of all ages.

“Part and parcel of why we convened the summit is it gives persons from all walks of life and every aspect of the community an opportunity to come together to dialogue and strategize about ways we can build bridges into the various communities,” said the keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Victor Brown, senior pastor of Mount Sinai United Christian Church in Tompkinsville.

“It’s a means of strategizing how we can truly bring the Island together as one borough.”

Rev. Brown encouraged participants to “rise above their differences and see that there is more to unify us than divide us.”

The financial problems that beset the nation could be the impetus for positive transformations, said Rev. Brown, who as a community activist is president of the New Brighton Coalition of Concerned Citizens and president/CEO of the Mount Sinai Neighborhood Enrichment Center.

“In tough economic times, we don’t really need to swing to the winds of change but, in essence, to become change,” Rev. Brown said.

Quoting the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — “change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability” — Rev. Brown used Gandhi’s words as he urged the crowd to “be the change you wish to see.”

The summit was sponsored by Communities United for Respect and Trust, with member agencies including the NAACP, The Staten Island Immigrants Council, Eye Openers, Project Hospitality and Make the Road New York. The conference was funded in part by the New York Foundation.