

## Opening Minds & Hearts!

*A newsletter of the National Conference for Community and Justice of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts, Inc.  
Founded in 1927 as the National Conference of Christians and Jews*



BRIDGES participants at Easthampton High School in CT interact during a group dialogue session.

## BRIDGES

**BRIDGES** is a two-day human relations program where 20 students and two teachers are guided through a series of activities that promote a positive self-image, critical thinking skills, and a positive view of others. Participants develop insights and new views of themselves, an understanding of their own prejudices and where they might have learned them, a deeper tolerance for other cultures, for newcomers to this country, and for the racial, ethnic, and cultural problems that confront our society.

For more information on how your school in your community can participate in **BRIDGES**, please contact the NCCJ offices at (860) 683-1039 ext. 102.

## BRIDGES Fall/Winter 2006-2007

The 2006-2007 school year has already been a year of expansion for the **BRIDGES** program in Connecticut and Western Massachusetts. With new **BRIDGES** programs taking place at Westfield Vocational & Technical High School (Westfield, MA,) Springfield Expeditionary Learning School, (Springfield, MA), Quirk Middle School (Hartford, CT,) East Hampton High School (East Hampton, CT,) and Glastonbury High School (Glastonbury, CT,) these students will join with others from schools across the region to fight bias, bigotry, and racism.

One important piece of the **BRIDGES** program is the development of an action plan by the students. Action projects can range from personal development goals to plans to transform the culture of the entire school. At Westfield Vocational and Technical High School, the students are implementing an identity mural project where every student will have the opportunity to represent their identity through pictures and words. Rocky Hill High School students are actively organizing a Diversity Day for the entire student body where students will have a chance to teach each other about prejudice and stereotypes. East Hampton High School will be organizing a school wide assembly and making a video about diversity. Whatever projects the students decide to take on after the **BRIDGES** program, they do it with a new understanding of themselves, a new awareness of their actions, and a respect for others.

## SAVE THE DATES

- March 20 Diversity Conference for Connecticut Youths, Wesleyan
- March 23 - 24 True Colors Annual Youth Conference
- March 31 -April 1 PeaceJam - Northeast
- April Watch for NCCJ's new website!  
[www.nccjctwma.org](http://www.nccjctwma.org).
- April 11 Community Coalition for Teens 16th Annual Conference
- April 12 The 2007 Connecticut Annual Human Relations Award Banquet
- April 28 Democracy Works, Youth Forum
- April 29 House of Worship Tour
- May 6 The Faith Club Program
- May 17 CCR Public Forum
- May 25 - 29 NCCJ's Camp ANYTOWN
- June 6 The 2007 Western Massachusetts Annual Human Relations Awards Banquet
- August 19- 24 NCCJ's Camp ANYTOWN

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**“BRIDGES taught me that there is a lot to be done and it begins with me!”**

*-Westfield Vocational Technical High School Student*

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# AN EVENING OF "SPIRIT RAISING MUSIC" NCCJ SPONSORS HOLLY NEAR CONCERT



Holly Near and her band pause for a photo with the NCCJ staff.  
Left - right: John Bucchino, Quinn Van Antwerp, Jan Martinelli, Holly Near, Amanda Gumbs, Andrea, Kandel, Kelly Benkert, Barbara Moody and Eva Storrs.

On September 29<sup>th</sup> NCCJ sponsored a "sold-out" concert with singer and social activist Holly Near at the Academy of Music Theatre in Northampton, MA. It was such a joy to have Holly Near here to inspire and ignite our souls at this "spirit raising" event for the NCCJ. Her music, message and vision of justice and peace in the world mirrors NCCJ's mission of fighting bias, bigotry and racism. What Holly sings about is what the NCCJ educates about.

Holly is a unique blend of musician, songwriter, entertainer and activist. An immense vocal talent, her career as a singer has been profoundly defined by an unwillingness to separate her passion for music from her passion for human dignity. She is a skilled performer and an outspoken ambassador for peace who successfully integrates world consciousness, spiritual discovery and theatrics to the center stage.

The Holly Near concert was a total success for the NCCJ. Everyone enjoyed themselves that evening and the NCCJ were so proud to have sponsored this important and entertaining event for our community.

Holly has been an unrelenting voice for social change for over 30 years. The NCCJ was proud to have honored her with the Unity Award in 1993 for her lifetime commitment to peace and justice.

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Holly Near with NCCJ Board members & supporters.  
Left - right: Judith Perkins, Henry Zachs, Holly Near, Brewster Perkins and Judith Zachs.

# YOUTH ACTION COALITION

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The **Youth Action Coalition (YAC)** is a group of former Camp ANYTOWN and BRIDGES alumni and other interested youth who meet to continue social justice training and engage in youth community action projects. YAC meets twice a month at the NCCJ offices in Windsor. For more information on YAC, contact the NCCJ offices at **860-683-1039 ext. 102** or email **kbenkert@nccjtwma.org**.

YAC members have been busy putting their words into action. At both Wethersfield High School and at East Windsor High School, ANYTOWN alumni have created new organizations at their schools to bring about greater social justice. The groups known as SAID (Students Against Isms and Discrimination) have worked both independently and in coalition to share ideas, resources, and organizing tips. Both schools have planned diversity activities that will highlight students' cultures through singing, dance, poetry, food, skits and music.

At Glastonbury High School, YAC members ran a safe language campaign with a goal of creating a safer school by eliminating the use of certain words and phrases by students. A permanent display in the main hallway of the school will remain as a constant reminder to students and faculty of the power of words.

The Youth Action Coalition is also working with PeaceJam, an organization that brings youth together with Nobel Peace Prize winners. Throughout 2007, YAC members will be learning about the life and work of Betty Williams, who, along with Mairead Corrigan, began a small door-to-door signature drive that sprang into what is now known the world over as the Peace Movement of Northern Ireland. The other component of PeaceJam is developing an action project out of the Global Call to Action developed by over a dozen Nobel Peace Prize winners. The project will culminate with a youth conference at Elms College in Chicopee, MA where Betty Williams will join the youth in a weekend of workshops, networking, presentations, and community learning. For more information about the conference or YAC's PeaceJam work, contact [kbenkert@nccj.org](mailto:kbenkert@nccj.org).



Former Camp ANYTOWN participants mug for the camera during the January 19th reunion. Left—right: Rosie Abraham, Kendra Smith and Emily Budd.

**“I now see things in a new perspective. I will make change in my community!”**

*– Rocky Hill High School Student*

## ANYTOWN Reunion & Action Planning Summit

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On Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, over 75 Camp ANYTOWN alumni gathered together to reconnect, eat pizza, and most of all, share their stories of action. After playing a few games and catching up with old friends, the alumni cleared the floor for their peers to talk about the work they've been doing since ANYTOWN.

Students from Cromwell, Wethersfield, Hall, Windsor, Capital Prep, Glastonbury, and Greenfield High Schools stood in front of the group to share their stories of success with their peers. Highlights include Windsor High School's successful toiletry and necessities drive for a domestic violence shelter, Capital Prep's joint efforts with Trinity College to organize a symposium on racism and homophobia, and Glastonbury High School's campaign to curb the use of discriminatory language. The youth offered each other organizing tips and ideas while inspiring each other to take new projects and programs back to their own schools.

If you have a success story about a social justice event or program you've planned, we want to hear about it! Email [kbenkert@nccjtwma.org](mailto:kbenkert@nccjtwma.org).

# ADULT PROGRAMS

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## Community Conversations on Race...

...are a group of six session, two hour weekly circles made up of 8-12 culturally diverse individuals; led by two trained NCCJ facilitators, who aid participants in exploring personal experiences and public policies that impact race relations. The expectation is to work towards developing action plans that will help participants impact their “sphere of control” on a personal, community and organizational level. We invite you to participate in an action group or create your own—either way, work within your sphere of influence to help bridge the divides across racial, ethnic and neighborhood lines and build an inclusive community. For information on how you or your organization can become a part of **CCR** please contact the NCCJ offices at **860-683-1039 ext. 105** or email [jroberts@nccjtwma.org](mailto:jroberts@nccjtwma.org).



Christ Church Cathedral Participants  
Back Row: Left — right: Edith Ray, Lisa Dailey, Michael Stevens, Barbara Loh, June Watson, Burt Hansen, Monique Ray-Burwell. Center: Marcie Hammond and Charles Berry Simons. Bottom Row, left—right: James Munroe, Rosemarie Martinez, Gilda Garcia and Xiomara Reyes.

## Christ Church Cathedral Hosts CCR

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After participating in a Community Conversations on Race dialogue, Rev. William Dwyer of Christ Church Cathedral in Springfield, MA proposed NCCJ to facilitate a discussion at his church. In an article published in *The Republican* newspaper, Dwyer suggested the dialogues would be “part of a call of a Christian church to break down barriers. It is right in the New Testament” he said. The Springfield Episcopal Church has a diverse latino, black and white membership. Burt Hansen, site coordinator shared with *The Republican* that the church did not have a specific issue or problem to address but saw the Community Conversations program as an opportunity to explore issues surrounding race in the local community. Conversation participant Dean James G. Munroe added, that there were few religious issues raised during their discussions “Instead, there was simply awareness that every member of the group shared the bond of being a member of a community of faith that is founded on grace and tender mercy and forgiveness.”

The program was offered as part of the church’s Adult Education program. In an overwhelming response to session one, the church sponsored a second six week session of Community Conversations that ended in mid December of 2006. Terry Nelson and Judith Barlow-Roberts facilitated the dialogues.

## NCCJ Staff Share in Worship Experience

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The Islamic Society of Western MA opened their doors of faith to NCCJ staff members. Mosque members shared the principals of the Islamic faith in addition to preparing a delicious luncheon for NCCJ staff.

The Islamic Center of Western MA, located at 377 Amostown Road, West Springfield, MA will participate in an upcoming House of Worship Tour, scheduled for the spring of 2007. The tour co-sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Western MA. The tour is designed to promote understanding and respect for all faiths.



# ADULT PROGRAMS

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## Connecticut Secretary of State's Office a Success!

NCCJ returns to the CT Secretary of State's Office. A Kick-off luncheon was held in September with Deputy Secretary Lesley Mara as the keynote speaker. The Secretary of State's office will host another series of Community Conversations on Race this spring. Facilitators Stephen Balcanoff and Judith Barlow-Roberts join in the photo at right.

*"I was honored to be part of a process where participants from diverse backgrounds shared their understanding of racial history and the effects race has had on them individually. It is only through people communicating their issues and acknowledging the past that society as a whole can continue toward mutual acceptance and true equality."*

*-Susan Phillips,  
Site Coordinator & HR Manager*



Top row: Left - right: Preston Tisdale, Stu Winograd. Middle row, left-right: Myrna Crespo, Sue Phillips, Stephanie Gary and Stephen Balcanoff. Bottom row, left-right: Judith Barlow-Roberts, Santasha Bell, Ruby A. Veal and Mamjula Bamda. Missing from photo: Irma Reyes

## Capital & Trinity Students Undergo Community Conversations on Race Program

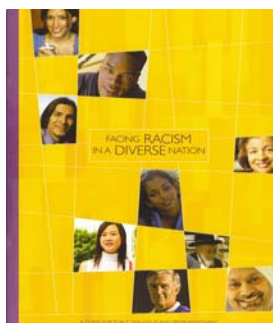
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Trinity students Darrien Watson and Stephanie Irizarry listen intently to fellow participants.

A group of ten racially and ethnically diverse students of color from Trinity and Capital Community College participated in Community Conversations on Race program. The dialogues were facilitated by NCCJ staff members Judith Barlow-Roberts, Kelly Benkert and Jenny Carrasco. The process focused on personal experiences with racism, current campus and community issues, and resulted in the development of strategies for taking action. As part of the group's action plan, the students will support an upcoming International Hip Hop Festival scheduled in April on the Trinity campus.

## NCCJ Introduces Revised Dialogue Guide



The Study Circle Resource Center has updated their *Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation* dialogue guide. The new guide has updated materials and activities to create more inclusive discussion sessions that would address the needs and experiences of many groups including recent immigrants and people of mixed backgrounds. In addition, the revised guide moves from a 5 session process to 6 sessions, with a community report card. The new guide is also available in Spanish.

**The NCCJ thanks the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for their generous support of Community Conversations on Race.**

# NCCJ BOARD RETREAT - Emphasizes Diversity Training



Dr. Maura Cullen facilitates a discussion group for the NCCJ board. Seated from left to right are: Erica Broman, Judith Barlow Roberts and Barbara Moody.

Annually NCCJ board members have an opportunity to spend a day together focusing on aspects of the organization. This fall saw an opportunity to spend a day focusing on the mission and what fighting bias, bigotry and racism meant to each of us. Dr. Maura Cullen, an internationally renowned diversity educator, facilitated our day together. Maura is a masterful storyteller and trainer. She was inspirational, challenging and fun. Board and staff were led through small and large group exercises covering privilege, ability to listen to others, perceptions of one another and our own relationships to social identity. The group was treated to a multi-act play starring Dr. Cullen herself, in which various personalities were depicted and their impact on social consciousness.

Everyone enjoyed the time together. Many of those who attended Dr. Cullen's session went to Northampton for the Holly Near concert that evening. Art Marquardt, Greater Hartford board member, summed it up best:

*“ Food for Board Retreat \$200 -  
Furniture rental for retreat \$150 -  
Introduction to Maura Cullen and Holly Near: priceless ”*



## In the Spotlight...

Arthur C. Marquardt, former CEO of CT Natural Gas and an active member of NCCJ's Board of Directors, was introduced to NCCJ during a training exercise conducted with Hartford business and community leaders. Art participated in a "privilege walk" which impacted him in a very deep manner. Approximately 40 business, government and nonprofit leaders gathered, responded to twenty questions relating to privilege and it became clear that although each was a key leader in our community, everyone had a different journey getting to this point. You could say some folks walked a lot farther than others, but following this exercise, the group could relate, listen and talk with one another more effectively. Later Art was approached by former NCCJ President & CEO Sandy Cloud and current Executive Director Andrea Kandel to chair a *Walk As One* fund raising event for the NCCJ. Through these experiences Art gained a better understanding of NCCJ's work and became an ally. Art was asked to chair the CT NCCJ Board in 2001. In 2005 Art was instrumental in leading NCCJ on both a national and regional level from a unitary model of governing to an affiliate model. Thus, enabling the Connecticut and Western Massachusetts region greater autonomy in our program and fund development. Art continues to remain close to NCCJ and is a pivotal part of it's process.

Although his term as Chair has ended, Art remains a dedicated member of the Board of Directors as he believes NCCJ programming continues to make dramatic impacts in the community. Art commented Art remains firm in his conviction that although we have made significant strides over the past several years, there is still work to be done, we need to stabilize our operations and then broaden our footprint in both CT and Western Mass. He added,

“To date resources have limited the communities we have reached, but our job is not done. We need to develop the necessary relationships and funding sources to bring our programming to all communities within our geographic territory.”



NCCJ Board Members enjoy a day of diversity enrichment. Clockwise: Stephen Roche, David Scheinerman, Susan Redmond, Cheryl Smith, Brewster Perkins, Jane Albert and Cheeneah Armstrong.

**“Though persecuted groups may have some new faces, many are the same. A key part of our ability to fight bias, bigotry and racism, is the ability to open communications across divides, a characteristic embedded in the fabric of NCCJ's programs.”**

*-Art Marquardt, Board of Directors*

# WHAT'S HAPPENING

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**March 20** Diversity Conference for Connecticut Youths, Wesleyan University for details visit [www.wesleyanuniversity.com](http://www.wesleyanuniversity.com)

**March 23 - 24** True Colors Annual Youth Conference. Visit [www.ourtruecolors.org](http://www.ourtruecolors.org) for event information

**March 31 - April 1** PeaceJam Northeast Conference, Elms College  
Lead by Nobel Peace Laureate Betty Williams, the conference is open to all youths in the Northeast.  
Visit [www.nextgenleaders.org](http://www.nextgenleaders.org) for event information.

**April 2007** Watch for NCCJ's new website! Visit us as we go live at [WWW.NCCJCTWMA.ORG](http://WWW.NCCJCTWMA.ORG).

**April 11** Community Coalition for Teens 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Conference, Greenfield Middle School, Greenfield, MA  
*Challenge Yourself, Change the Future*, Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 8am - 12pm. Contact Greenfield Middle School at 413-773-1360.

**April 12** The 2007 Connecticut Annual Human Relations Award Banquet—Hilton Hotel, Hartford Connecticut. For information and reservations contact the NCCJ offices at 860-683-1039, ext. 108.

**April 28** Third Annual Youth and Democracy Forum, 1pm—3pm, North Lobby of the State Capitol Building Hartford, CT. Contact [www.DemocracyWorksCT.org](http://www.DemocracyWorksCT.org) for details.

**April 29** House of Worship Tour, Springfield, MA region. Includes tours of Sinai Temple in Springfield, Unitarian Universalist Society of Greater Springfield and The Islamic Society of Western MA, West Springfield, MA. For more information contact the NCCJ offices at 860-683-1039, ext 105.

**May 5** Co-sponsored by NCCJ and Beth Israel - Meet the Muslim, Christian and Jewish authors who co-wrote the book, *The Faith Club* at Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, CT. For more information contact the NCCJ offices at 860-683-1039, ext 105.

**May 17** *Can We Talk? Are We Able to Talk About Israel & Palestine Without Polarizing?* CCR Forum  
Guest speakers include Muslim scholar Abdula Antepi from the Hartford Seminary, Yehezkel Landau, Faculty Associate in Interfaith Relations, Hartford Seminary, and Donald G. Ellis, Professor of Communication, University of Hartford. Unitarian Universalist Society of Springfield, Springfield, MA. 7—p pm.  
For more information contact the NCCJ offices at 860-683-1039, ext 105.

**May 25 - 29** NCCJ's Camp ANYTOWN. Preparing youths to be the leaders of tomorrow and today! Open to middle and high schools students of Capital Prep Magnet School, Conard High School Cromwell High School, Hall High School, Wethersfield High School and Windsor High School. Contact the NCCJ offices for registration information at 860-683-1039, ext 102.

**June 6** The 2007 Western Massachusetts Annual Human Relations Awards Banquet , Chez Josef, Agawam MA. For information and reservations contact the NCCJ offices at 860-683-1039, ext 108.

**August 19- 24** NCCJ's Camp ANYTOWN® YMCA Camp Jewell. Preparing youths to the leaders of tomorrow and today! Open to middle and high schools students of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts.  
Contact the NCCJ offices for registration information at 860-683-1039, ext 102.

## NCCJ'S Recommendation Corner

Films That Illustrate NCCJ's Mission

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### *Dreamgirls*

An entertaining account of a 60's era Motown "girl group" that artfully details the rise of three young, beautiful and gifted African American women as they tenaciously and successfully pursue control of their own careers, finances and lives.

### *Blood Diamond*

A provocative, yet realistic depiction of the South African diamond mining industry and the impact on the surrounding community. Conflict diamonds reflect the hidden culpability of the international diamond market.

### *The Pursuit of Happiness*

A gripping and truthful depiction of one's man triumph over adversity, homelessness and the challenges of single parenthood. This film examines the classist structure within America.

### *Independent Lens - Beyond the Call*.....PBS Series

True documentaries of three real life 'knights' who answer the call for human needs by delivering aid around the globe to some of the most dangerous and poverty stricken regions afflicted. Check your local listings for times and channels.



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