

Editorial: Unite Rochester is inspiring solutions to racism

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The Rochester Storytellers Project is among several news ways that the Democrat and Chronicle is telling the story of our community through the eyes of people who live here. Olivia Lopez

A lesbian couple who moved here, in part, because of Wegmans. A deaf woman who has spent much of her life struggling to be heard. An engaging Latino leader who rose above his abusive childhood and criminal past. A Jewish doctor with a penchant for meeting others who are not like him. A black woman living in poverty who fell after her mother died, and was lifted back up by her church. A black female professional who follows her own path. A young refugee with only one vivid, and frightening, memory from childhood. A rural white couple who brought home two babies from Africa.

These are your neighbors. Last week, they told their stories in front of 135 others in the audience – each of whom has his or her own unique tale to tell as well.

This is what diversity looks like in Greater Rochester, even though we tend to think of our differences in simpler terms: black or white, rich or poor, city or suburb, straight or gay. The truth is, we are as different as we are numerous.

But, when we take the time to listen to one another in a safe environment, we are not threatened by these differences. And, we start to see similarities, form bonds, develop empathy and understanding, and find better ways to get along.

That was the idea behind last week's event, the Democrat and Chronicle's Unite Rochester/Rochester Storytellers Project, held at the city's public market. It is also the goal of another important Unite Rochester initiative that is coming to fruition.

Rochester's Community Response Team is being put in place to defuse potentially volatile situations before civil unrest erupts in our community, as we have seen happen in places like Ferguson, Baltimore, and Charlottesville. Team members begin their training this weekend.

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The team grew out of the Unite Rochester Criminal Justice Committee, under the tenacious leadership of Cynthia Herriott, who now works at the Rochester Housing Authority. It has already caught national attention, as researchers from Ohio State University [study four communities](#) putting similar plans in place – Rochester, Orlando, Florida, Columbus, Ohio and San Mateo, California.

For those who might not know, Unite Rochester is an initiative of the Democrat and Chronicle Editorial Board. It was launched nearly five years ago to help raise awareness of racism in Rochester, and to encourage community leaders to collaborate on solutions.

While it is impossible to get an accurate count of all the good that has come from the ongoing efforts of Unite Rochester and its members, this week brought two very clear examples.

The battle against racism won't be won overnight, but that does not mean that it is lost.