

Hamilton is for all people:

Mayor Larry Di Ianni urges the community to combat ugly intolerance of minority groups

By Larry Di Ianni

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An ancient Roman historian once said, "Small communities grow great through harmony, great ones fall to pieces through discord." It is a statement I take to heart as your mayor. It is a message that should move us all to do some self-examination of our own actions and relationships in our work and daily lives.

Harmony is a value we may not readily recognize as an intrinsic component to building strong communities.

Many of us have settled in Hamilton because we appreciate the attributes of this community that other cities or other countries don't have -- freedom, peace, prosperity and safety to name a few.

Hamiltonians have a tremendous spirit of community, a fervent civic pride and a genuine concern for their neighbours' well-being. Harmony is at the core of those attributes.

Then why do we have a portion of our community fearing for its safety? Why is the insidious term "hate crimes" on the lips of many of our residents and community leaders?

Recently, I called an emergency meeting of the members of Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative (SHCI). It was an opportunity to bring these community leaders together to share their expertise on combating racism and hate crimes in our community following an attack on one of our local businessmen.

The assault was a terrible incident, a stain on our collective community values. It was an appalling event that sent shock waves through our community, and particularly the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) community and the communities of colour.

The lessons learned from that SHCI meeting were clear. The bonds of community harmony have been shaken by ignorance of and hostility toward a segment of our community that makes up Hamilton's rich mosaic -- the GLBT community. A lack of understanding and ignorance of the GLBT community has escalated into subtle and outright hostility.

Let me categorically state that Hamilton's civic and community leaders will not tolerate hatred in any form. Violence that stems from intolerance is clearly offensive to this community's sensibilities. Hamilton is a community for all people in all of their diversities.

We, as a community, must foster acceptance and through education and understanding, generate an environment of safety and harmony. We must tackle the root causes of racism and discrimination and work towards their elimination before prejudices and ignorance escalate into aberrant behaviours.

I particularly implore our city's youth and leaders of our youth to help eradicate hatred from our community. With greater awareness and education of the diverse cultures, religions, sexual orientations, racial and ethnic roots our citizens bring to Hamilton, our youth will grow with that knowledge and help promote harmony in our community. As an impressionable segment of society and as future community leaders, our youth needs to have access to unbiased information on all segments of our diverse community.

I also invite community members, community groups, businesses and educators to come together to celebrate Hamilton's diversity. With greater mutual understanding we will have the collective power to find solutions to combat the ugly manifestations of ignorance and intolerance in our community.

This is a call to action. I am asking each and every one of you to do your part -- at home, in your personal life, at work and in the community, to promote and celebrate a greater awareness and understanding of our diverse community.

I am very heartened by the willingness of so many community members and groups who have already come together to promote harmony in our community.

It will take the effort and commitment of all of us - every single resident, every worker, every student - to make Hamilton a vibrant and harmonious community that values our diversity.

From greater harmony will grow a greater community.

Hamilton is a Community for all

We, the undersigned representatives of concerned organizations within the Hamilton community, fully endorse Mayor Larry Di Ianni's statement.

As members of the Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative, we rededicate ourselves to working in partnership with him and the residents of this city to dialogue and plan actions to overcome hate and discrimination and build a harmonious community.

- Renee Johnston, Executive Director, Workers Arts and Heritage Centre
- R. John Dolbec, Chief Executive Officer, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
- Winston Tinglin, Chief Executive Officer, United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton
- Javid Mirza, President, Hamilton Muslim Association
- Jagoda Pike, Publisher, The Hamilton Spectator
- Gary Purdy, Professor and Director, McMaster University Centre for Peace Studies
- Joan Browning Hamilton Mundialization Committee representative to SHCI
- National Assoc. of Japanese Canadians (Hamilton) representative to SHCI
- Wayne Marston, President, Hamilton and District Labour Council
- Dana Robbins, Editor-in-Chief, The Hamilton Spectator
- Dr. Kevin P. D. Smith, President and Chief , Executive Officer, St. Joseph's Healthcare

- Lyla Miklos, Interim Chair, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Committee for The City of Hamilton
- Harish C. Jain, Professor, McMaster University
- Morteza Jafarpour, Executive Director, Settlement & Integration Services Organization
- Dr. Bonnie Loewith, President, Hamilton Jewish Federation
- Dr. David Somer, VP Community Relations, Hamilton Jewish Federation
- Dr. Lorne Finkelstein, SHCI Roundtable representative, Hamilton Jewish Federation
- Dr. Lester Krames, SHCI Roundtable representative, Hamilton Jewish Federation
- Anne M. Pearson, Co-Chair, Hamilton Interfaith Group
- Dr. Gary Warner, Director of Arts and Science, McMaster University
- Gerald Fisher, Executive Director, Hamilton Jewish Federation
- Dr. Leila Ryan, Chair, Hamilton Community Foundation
- Lenore Lukasik-Foss, Sexual Assault Centre (Hamilton & Area)
- Rebecca Wissensz, President, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
- Dennis Concordia, Director, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
- Brian Mullan, Chief of Police, Hamilton Police Services

Hamilton Community Foundation:

Hamilton Community Foundation shares the vision Mayor Larry Di Ianni has expressed that citizens need to join together to promote harmony, to value diversity and to eradicate discrimination in our community. We join with the mayor, members of Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative (SHCI) and all concerned citizens across Hamilton in affirming our commitment to build greater awareness, understanding and respect of the diversity of our community.

Dr. Leila Ryan, chair

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce:

Violence of any description is always despicable and completely unacceptable under any circumstances, save possibly for immediate self-defence, in any civilized society. This is particularly abhorrent when the violence is inspired by unreasoned, indeed unreasonable, hatred of a someone belonging to an identifiable group by virtue of such uncontrollable factors as simply their race, gender, ethnicity, religious or political affiliation, or sexual orientation. There is simply no tolerance for hate crimes of any sort in this community.

His Worship and city council, as well as our police chief, have the full and unwavering support of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, as the recognized Voice of Ethical Business in this community, in their reasonable efforts to eradicate this evil in our City.

R. John Dolbec, chief executive officer

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Committee for The City of Hamilton:

Thank you members of SHCI for your heartfelt support and constructive dialogue and your willingness to learn from this horrible experience and turn a negative into a positive.

Thank you Mayor Di Ianni for your words and actions of healing, respect and acceptance. I look forward to seeing this eloquent and compelling message in Saturday's Hamilton Spectator. I believe the GLBT community will be profoundly touched by what you have said.

Lyla Miklos, interim chair

Hamilton Interfaith Group:

On behalf of the Hamilton Interfaith Group, I would like to extend our appreciation for both the efforts of the Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative and Mayor Di Ianni's statement reminding us that Hamilton is a community for ALL people, and that our strength and collective well-being lies in unity and in diversity. We condemn all expressions of hate and prejudice, including that directed against our fellow citizens from the GLBT segment of our community.

Anne M. Pearson, co-chair