

TROY ETHNIC ISSUES ADVISORY BOARD
Minutes for Thursday, August 27, 2009

I. Call to Order 7:07 pm

II. Roll Call

Present Kelly Jones
 Karen Yelder
 Michelle Haight
 Cathy Francois
 Sharon MacDonell
 Mayada Fakhouri
 John Witt
 Cindy Stewart, City Liaison
 Lily Huang, Student Rep
 Dan Guo, Student Rep

Absent Reuben Ellis
 Veena Rao

III. **Approval of Minutes**

Motion to approve June 2, 2009 minutes by Cathy Francois, seconded by John Witt.

IV. **Correspondence/Articles**

August 28, 2009 Troy Times – Article about the City charging non-profits at the Community Center

The African Children's Choir will be performing at the Big Beaver United Methodist Church on September 2 at 7 pm.

V. **Old Business**

a. The judging for the Troy Daze EthniCity Poster Contest is Monday, September 14 at 7 pm at the Troy Community Center. The student representatives are invited to help judge, if their calendars allow. Michelle needs help picking up poster entries on September 11 at the schools: Mayada – Schroeder; Kelly – Hill and Wass; Sharon – Leonard and Costello; John – Bemis; Michelle – Barnard and Wattles. Michelle will collect after judging and bring the posters to Boulan Park on Thursday to put them up in the tent on Thursday at 6:30 pm. Karen Yelder offered to take over the Poster Contest on 2010 and will shadow Michelle to facilitate the transition.

- b. School District Updates
 - Kelly will contact the Diversity Coordinator Roslyn Cox to attend the October 6th meeting.
 - Elementary Schools: Michelle and Padma Kuppa (of the Troy Interfaith Group), Mayada and Nadeen Brown presented their orientation program to the approximately 80 new district teachers. They told them about the EIAB, the Troy Interfaith Group; serving the needs of the Arab-American community and the African American community. They stressed all of the resources available for teachers related to multi-culturalism and diversity.
 - They also handed out the Cultural Connection Newsletter with an article on the “10 (Self-Critical) things I will do to be a better multi-cultural educator.” They also spoke to the teachers about “Oceans of Pearl” written by a Troy resident named Dr. Neelam describing his struggles given his religion (Sikh) and his professional life. The EIAB discussed having a screening when it’s on DVD for the Community. Dr. Aubrey Melton the principal from the International Academy East would also like something at her building.
- c. Cultural brochures: Still waiting on content from members. Drafts of the Japanese and Arab brochures will be sent so the group can see how much room is left for content. Remember to include cultural statistics, historical traditions, customs and holidays. Lily will be getting content for China and Cathy and David will get information on Russia.
- d. African American Support Group: Held a picnic at Fire Fighters on August 23. The next meeting is Monday, September 21 at 7:30 pm at the TSD Service Center. The speaker is Rachelle Williams, “Determined Excellence.”

VI. **New Business**

- a. New student representative, David Guo, was welcomed to the Board. He is a senior at the International Academy in Bloomfield Hills. He previously attended Costello Elementary and Larson Middle Schools in Troy. He is involved in the Save Our Species Charity (focused on endangered animals). He also plays piano and paints. He is interested in one day starting a business.
- b. Cathy Russ, the Troy Public Library Director, was introduced to the Board. She came to the meeting to address the topic of “Book Groups;” the EIAB had discussed at the June meeting the possibility of starting up a multicultural book group. Cathy noted she grew up in Troy and is thrilled to be the library director.

Cathy said the library hosts four book groups: Booked for Lunch (a group that has been meeting for 32 years), an Evening Book Discussion Group called Life Readers, a Mystery Book Group and the Dan Ewald Group facilitated by Dan Ewald. The Library is starting a new nonfiction book group that is meeting every other month. All are discussion groups and they stick to discussing the book in a respectful and courteous way. There is also a group called “Talk

Time” dedicated to those for whom English is a second language. The group meets the first Saturday of every month to help people with their conversational English skills. Their October book discussion is “Escape: The Story of the Great Houdini.” The group ranges in age from late 20s to 60s and the average size is 12-15 in a group.

The Library only has one meeting room. Need to decide dates, times and who would lead the discussion. Also need to decide on the focus. The Friends of the Troy Public Library sells used books at the book store; their revenue pays for book groups. Cathy would have to “sell” the idea to the Friends. Community Affairs would help promote the group. Book Groups are popular and are becoming more popular due to the economy and people looking for free past times. It’s a great way for people to converse with others, make friends and read.

Michelle wondered if it would be best to do a book club or more of a “community read.” Cathy pointed out that the Library participates in “One Book, One Community.” This season the focus is on the works of Jane Austen. If the EIAB wanted to do a Community Read, the TPL could help facilitate the venue and provide books.

Kelly proposed finding a compelling book for the community, sponsored by the EIAB; she noted she is not sure if the Board could undertake a monthly group. Cathy said it is the job of the TPL to show its usefulness to the Community and would help. It does this by working with the Coalition, sending librarians into schools and doing tours.

Michelle noted that it seems feasible to work on the idea of a community read and tie in with other local non-profits. Cathy can lend her experience to help the EIAB do a book group. Many books come with a “leader book discussion guide.” The best groups are the ones where the leader doesn’t have to talk a lot. The library can help with questions and also with lists of books to read.

Kelly asked if the EIAB decided on a book, how could the Library help? Cathy said the Library would be at the EIAB’s service. Cathy said there would be a need to pick a date/alternate dates). She doesn’t recommend weekends or Fridays. She said the EIAB may want to consider fiction because it is easier to discuss based on characters and the story offering a lot of avenues for discussion. Kelly wondered about the idea of a contest to solicit feedback and people could suggest a book for a community read. Cathy said this would be easier if you have a way to promote, such as the Troy Today, and a way to give people choices. She cautioned not to bite off more than the group can chew – start small and reasonable and then grow the program. The larger the group is, the more chaotic it becomes.

- c. Sat Basu and Utpal Dutta from Path Bhban Language School. The school called Kelly regarding the need for help with their appeal related to the Community Center charging non-profits to use the facility. Sat Basu has been in Troy since 1975 teaching Bengali, the 6th largest language in India. In 1983, they began running the Path Bhban Language School from the Community

Center, teaching language and culture to anyone interested in learning it for 26 years. Other branches were started in Ann Arbor and Novi. They are trying to find places to teach the language, free. All teachers and helps are volunteers. Kelly attended a class and said it is well run, organized and professional. It's a gift they provide to the community. The majority of students are children from Bengali families, some families and some others who want to learn about the language and understand the culture.

The Community Center said they would give them one Friday free for 3 hours. 40 weeks at \$20 an hour (3 hours) totals \$2,400 a year. 12 weeks free. Michelle asked if it would be possible to find another place to meet within Troy? Classes are made up of approximately 25 people, 90 percent Troy residents, with an average age of 6-15 years. The City Administration is trying to talk to local businesses who might have room at their buildings for free space. Sat Basu has called local churches and facilities and was told they could use space, but not consistently.

Kelly wants to express her disappointment in Council not wanting to support diversity. John said there needs to be a consistent policy for non-profits; can't let one group have priority over another. Michelle is disappointed, noting that this group is the only one asking for this special favor; it is educational. Sharon asked if it would be an option to have participants pay a nominal fee? Sat Basu said it could, but noted this should be a free service because they see it as basic education. If the Library charged, how many people would go to the Library? The group does rent rooms at the Community Center for parties and other meetings throughout the year, but it has never paid for teaching.

Lily asked if they have tried to get a business or corporation to sponsor the school. They had checked with Walsh College and also offered volunteer hours to the community in exchange for use of the facility. They have also tried to receive grants, but to no avail. It was suggested that they approach the United Way and the Troy Foundation for Educational Excellence. To learn more about this the Board is invited to the Community Center, Room 402, between 6:30 and 9:30 pm; the best time is 8:30 pm for the story time. More information is also available at www.bichitra.org.

- VII. Member Comment: Michelle shared more information about the free concert of the African Children's Choir on September 2 at the Big Beaver United Methodist Church. The choir is comprised of children 8-11 years old from Uganda. A free will offering will be taken at the concert to benefit the choir's "Music for Life Program." The program supports school establishments in Uganda and other African countries.

Kelly said she received an e-mail regarding "Dance of Diversity" in Farmington Hills. They are sponsoring a Friday evening cultural program at their Library to expose residents to different cultures. Kelly wants the EIAB to think about offering a program like this for the community for discussion at the October meeting. Food and music really bring people together. She would also like the group to consider

offering an annual award for a person or group who provides volunteerism on a multi-cultural level. For example, she would recommend Sat Basu for their volunteerism at the Flag Day Ceremony.

VII. Adjournment

Motion by Michelle, seconded by Mayada to adjourn at 9:29 pm.

Next Meeting Tuesday, October 6, 2009 at 7 pm

Kelly Jones, EIAB Vice Chair

Cindy Stewart, EIAB Recording Secretary