

Hands United Building Bridges Week 2019



Rabbi Jeffrey Arnowitz.

Melissa Fitchelbaum

Hands United Building Bridges' (HUBB) second annual Building Bridges Week brought the Tidewater community together for several meaningful events including a Shabbat service at Ohel Shalom Temple on Friday, January 11; the Summit Against Hate on Monday, January 14; and the screening of *An Act of Defiance* on Monday, January 21. The last two events were in partnership with the Community Relations Council of the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater.

Ohel Shalom Temple's service in honor of Dr. King's Birthday included many of his best loved teachings from his *I Have A Dream Speech* and other writings, as well as several spirituals including *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, *If I Can Help Somebody*, *Let*

My People Go and We Shall Overcome.

"The highlight was a sermon by OST member and social justice advocate, Susan Feit, about the historic relationship between the African American and Jewish communities in the struggle for civil rights," says Rabbi Rosalin Mandelberg. "Feit emphasized the beautiful friendship and shared vision of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Dr. King."

The service culminated with an opportunity to do the same work when Rabbi Mandelberg announced a new partnership with OST and the Basilica of St. Mary's in Tidewater Gardens whose goal is to foster closer relationships, share ritual and worship, and, ultimately, to work together in a service project for the benefit of the Tidewater Quadrant.

Rabbi Jeffrey Arnowitz of Congregation Beth El, and co-founder of HUBB says, "events like the Summit Against Hate and *Act of Defiance* are so important. Not only are building community and supporting our neighbors important Jewish values, if we expect others to support us when we are attacked, we have to show up for them as well. That's what building bridges is all about."

The Summit Against Hate brought a standing room only crowd to the Reba and Sam Sandler Family Campus to talk, pray, and sing in solidarity against the forces that seek to tear communities apart, as well as in support of understanding and fellowship. Among the inspiring messages

delivered by clergy, law enforcement, and others, were speeches from Dr. Aaron Spence, superintendent of Virginia Beach City Public Schools; Dr. Chris Garran, Cape Henry Collegiate School's head of school; Doron Ezickson, Anti-Defamation League's Washington D.C. regional director; a representative from Teens with a Purpose; and Chief Deputy Attorney General of Virginia, Cynthia Hudson.

As the speakers all talked about what standing up against hate means to them, Senator Mark Warner, unable to join in person, wrote a letter that was read aloud: "In America, being different does not make an individual 'the other.' Rather, it means that you contribute important perspectives and ideas that strengthen our communities. What makes this country so exceptional is that regardless of our color, our faith, or our creed—we are all equally American.... Together, we must reject hate in all its forms. Together, we must also recommit to speaking out against acts of bigotry, and purveyors of hatred, wherever they might be found."

Pearl Renwick, a sophomore at Bayside High School and a participant in the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities Connections program for high school students, addressed the crowd saying "through conversations with diverse people we are able to realize the danger of putting individuals in boxes and the beauty that comes when we break those boxes down. The world is a much better place when everyone feels they are an equally important part of it. The foundation for the future starts in schools, and when we create more inclusive institutions and communities today, we are sowing the seeds for a more fruitful and loving tomorrow. Inclusivity and an open mind are our true allies in the war against hate."

A showcase of more

than 20 local organizations that attendees could learn more information about or get involved with, was available after the speeches.

The film, *An Act of Defiance*, shown in partnership with the Virginia Festival of Jewish Film, brought more than 500 people to the TCC Roper Theater. *An Act of Defiance* tells the story of 10 South African men, including Nelson Mandela, who are arrested for conspiring to commit sabotage and violent acts against the repressive and Apartheid South African government. Their lawyer, Bram Fischer, puts his life in jeopardy to keep these men from receiving the death penalty.

Following the film, a panel discussion moderated by Barbara Hamm-Lee, host of WHRV's *Another View*, featured Dr. Reverend Sharon Riley of Faith Deliverance Christian Center in Norfolk and a member of HUBB's Leadership Council; Paula Bazemore, Hampton Roads program manager for the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, and Rabbi Jeffrey Arnowitz.

Eric Joffe, a South African native and Tidewater transplant, also participated on the panel to offer his insight into South Africa at the time of the film. According to Joffe, "the movie was quite unsettling as it portrayed the government and security police in such a realistic way that one was transported back to that dark time in South Africa's history. Bram Fisher, who headed up the defense of the treason trialists, was a member of a prestigious Afrikaner family. He gave up his position in his community to follow his conscience. He experienced tragedy in his family and ultimately lost his own life while jailed for the cause he believed in. In contrast, the prosecutor Percy Yuter came from an Eastern European Immigrant Jewish family. Ironically both Fisher and Yuter ended up being reviled by their respective communities."

HUBB's Building Bridges week offered many opportunities for the Tidewater community to learn from each other. For more information on HUBB, visit www.HUBBusa.org.



Pearl Renwick, sophomore at Bayside High School.



William Dean, Virginia Beach Police Department.