

2015 Duck Race to End Racism “Splash Off” Press Conference Remarks

May 13, 2015

1010 James Street, Syracuse, NY

Beth A. Broadway
President/CEO, InterFaith Works

Our theme today is ‘small victories of change.’

I actually think we are achieving big victories.

11,000 people have participated in our dialogue circles. The circles have been as wide-ranging as third grade students playing kick-ball and discovering the beauty of their different skin colors through a city-suburban painting project, all the way through intensive dialogues between police officers and community activists. We don't take for granted the important and life-changing work that is going on here through our Center for Dialogue.

We operate on several important theories of change – for our children's programs, the theory is that early, positive experiences with people who are different from ourselves leads to a lifetime of openness and understanding. And this leads to a lifetime of being able to operate in a global society, being able to work in multi-cultural teams, being able to cross boundaries of race, creed, and culture.

For adults, our theory is that the systems and structures of racism affect all of us, whether we are a person of color or a white person. This is often called institutional racism, and it is often invisible to the person who is on the receiving end of the systems privileges, but all too “in the face” of the person who is on the receiving end of racism. Our Dialogue Circles seek to build relationships among people who are on both ends of this spectrum, and to create deeper understanding of what it takes to become allies so that these structures of racism are dismantled.

We are proud of our work at the Ahmad & Elizabeth El-Hindi Center for Dialogue, and we are especially proud that we are helping our community to not Duck Racism.

Peter Willner
Director, Ahmad & Elizabeth El-Hindi Center for Dialogue

Good morning!

This is my first Duck Race and I'm so excited about it.

We're grateful to our team, which includes:

- our wonderful sponsors, including the leading sponsors of National Grid, Wegmans, O'Brien & Gere, and Lockheed Martin
- our fundraising co-chairs, Ms. Littlejohn and Ms. Britt,
- IFW staff and
- our vital community volunteers
- all of whom make the Duck Race the great event that it is every year.

Let me briefly tell you about the InterFaith Works' Ahmad & Elizabeth El-Hindi Center for Dialogue to serve as a regional hub for dialogue.

It was established through a generous gift from the Ahmad & Elizabeth El-Hindi Foundation.

We bring together disparate groups of people to foster mutual understanding and trust, and to find additional ways to work together for the betterment of our whole community.

Dialogue programs address community concerns and encourage understanding across racial, ethnic, religious, and community differences.

The El-Hindi Center for Dialogue incorporates the ongoing work of the Community Wide Dialogue to End Racism—now the longest-running dialogue of its kind in the nation.

Since 1995, more than 10,000 people have participated in more than 400 dialogue circles.

Some of our upcoming work will be to foster police-community dialogue and interfaith dialogue, the need for both can be seen almost every day in the news.

So we've got our work cut out for us but with this wonderful community we're looking forward to the work ahead.

Dr. Shiu-Kai Chin, PhD

Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

Syracuse University

InterFaith Works Board member

- Thank you corporate sponsors
- Why is this important?
 - 10 May *New York Times* interview with Joel Peterson of JetBlue, commenting on the importance of trust
 - Q: What did you do to make people trust you?
 - A: For me, a lot of it is listening. I'm a really good listener. It's not a technique—I'm really interested in what people have to say. But it does develop trust as a byproduct. If you're authentic, open, you call things as they are, you really are direct and you listen well, that develops trust.

- What we do in the Center for Dialogue is important is because we get people, communities, businesses, and institutions to listen to each other through their people. What we do is dialog, but more importantly, our product is trust. As author Steven Covey and General Martin Dempsey, Chairman Joint Chief of Staff say, “Our community will move at the speed of trust.”
- This is why the Duck Race and the Center for Dialog is worthy of your support and more.
- Thank you!

Dr. James K. Duah-Agyeman, PhD
Chief Diversity Officer, Division of Student Affairs
Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs
Syracuse University
InterFaith Works Board member

Let’s take a moment to reflect on recent events in cities across the nation. Ferguson! Baltimore! New York City! Syracuse! Think of any other city where institutionalized racism and other forms of social injustice are causing frustration and pain manifested in protests on the streets. In some of these cities, young black men have lost their lives for one reason or another, be it racism or otherwise. Perhaps, a can of soda and a box of skittles. Recall the phrases: “HANDS UP! DON’T SHOOT!”; “I CAN’T BREATHE!”; and “BLACK LIVES MATTER!”

For the work we do with the Syracuse Police Department, we can say “BLUE LIVES MATTER!” And, yes, for those of us at the front lines fighting racism and all forms of injustices, we can proudly say: “ALL LIVES MATTER.” We have no choice but to value and engage all sides to appreciate all lives.

Now, think about the power of Social Media in this engagement. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Instant Messenger, and the most recent and most dangerous of them all to me: Yik Yak. What is Yik Yak? You may ask. It is a social media application that “allows people to create, view, and respond anonymously to “Yaks” within 10 mile radius.” It could be somebody you know, somebody sitting next to you in class, or even a roommate. During the week of April 27, somebody posted a Yak originating on and around Syracuse University: This hurt. It read:

“Got really excited to see monkeys outside of Carnegie but there were just a bunch of black kids there. I wanted to see a fucking cute marmoset.”

In a message to the SU community responding to this, Chancellor Kent Syverud wrote:

“Recent events have sparked harmful dialogue on social media channels that does not reflect our core values as an open and inclusive community. As I have indicated before, it is very important for an academic institution to support free speech. However, Syracuse University does not condone hate speech of any kind, whether in-person or

via social media, anonymous or identified. Each of us in our community has a responsibility to students and to each other. We must each work to offer an environment at this University that is respectful, safe, and supportive.”

The Senior Vice President and Dean of Students, Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz, in conjunction with Dr. James Duah-Agyeman, Chief Diversity Officer, Division of Student Affairs and Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs, also sent a message to the community in which they wrote:

“Acts of marginalization and injustice occur all too often, reminding us that racism and systemic oppression continue to exist. Even here on our campus, the actions and words of a few impact us all and challenge the safer and more inclusive community that we aim to cultivate at Syracuse University. We join Chancellor Syverud and University leadership in reinforcing that we do not condone hate speech in any way, shape or form, as it does not reflect who we are and the work we do to create a caring and connected community.”

Syracuse University is very keen on educating our students on issues of diversity because academic excellence demands that students, faculty, and staff be able to engage in, respect, and appreciate diversity in all its forms.

We want Syracuse University students to feel they have been given real opportunities in settings where those with diverse interests and backgrounds can find ways to engage each other. The Division of Student Affairs Senior Vice President’s Council on Diversity and Inclusion is designed, to use the words of Thomas V. Wolfe, “to deepen and expand our diversity and inclusion mindset to create a socially just campus and community.” I happen to be the chair of this committee which includes dedicated faculty and staff. Among them are some of our own board members, Professors Shui-Kai Chin and Keith Alford.

We’ve gathered this morning to show our community that IFW is committed to stretching beyond the familiar to learn and appreciate different cultural heritages. As IFW and sponsors of the Duck Race, we aim “not to sit passively and comfortably with our separateness and our habits of mind, but instead to actively engage with people and ideas, however hard this work turns out to be.”

As I engage in this work of fighting racism with you, I realize how hard it is. Sometimes we may question and even doubt ourselves if we are making any difference. I know I do. But this is not the time to give up. I encourage each of us to draw strength and sustenance from each other when the going gets tough. Together we will make small strides which eventually will accumulate to a bigger stride towards our goal. Let’s keep on keeping on. We will make it.

Thank you for having me. Make it a great day.