

PRESSRELEASE

Mayor's Office • 100 East Michigan Blvd. • Michigan City, IN 46360 • (219)873-1400 • Fax: (219)873-1515

www.emichigancity.com

For Immediate Release

Date: September 24, 2003

Human Rights Commission Creates Diversity Activity Book

Michigan City, IN (September 24, 2003) – Nancy Widelski, Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission, announced that the organization has created a Diversity Activity Book which will be distributed to elementary school children in our community as part of an on-going program.

"The Human Rights Commission sought a means to provide young children with educational materials about cultural diversity that would increase their awareness and stimulate dialogue about the issue between them and their teachers and parents," Widelski said. "We decided that a coloring book would be a great tool to use."

The activity book, entitled "Living Together In Harmony," includes drawings of leaders from many cultures that children can decorate, but it contains much more than just coloring activities.

"The book includes very short stories followed by a few questions that are designed to illustrate diversity, challenges, and our perceptions of those issues," Widelski said. "For example, many of us make judgments about others based upon what we see rather than what we know. So one of our exercises involves two drawings: one by William Henry Johnson, an African-American artist, entitled "*Young Man In A Vest*" and the other "*Retrato de Ignacio Sanchez*" by Diego Rivera, a Mexican painter. The questions are: why is this man wearing a vest and tie? Or why is this young man barefoot? How old is he? What do you think he does for a living? How much education does he have?" The answers the children give to these questions will help the teacher lead a discussion in how our visual judgments and perceptions can be right...but they can also be very wrong."

One page of the book encourages children to create their own family tree by adding sibling, parent and grand-parent names to a tree inhabited by a squirrel and a few birds. Kwanzaa is described on one page while others include a shofar, the horn blown as the last part of the Yom Kippur service, Rangoli designs that are signs of welcome, presidential birthdays, a discussion of human rights and a few recipes from other cultures and other countries. One page discusses how people are both similar and different and includes an exercise: pictures of things children both need and want are on the page; they are instructed to circle in red the things they need and in blue the things they want; then they are to compare their results with those of their friends to see if the lists are similar or different.

Widelski said, "Several of the pages deal with physical challenges and differences. We've included both the brail and sign language alphabets and some exercises for children to do that will help them to experience some of the challenges their classmates deal with every day."

There are word puzzles and areas where children must fill in the blanks or draw a picture to represent their impression of a particular issue in this 40-page activity book.

“We started out with 250 copies,” Widelski said, “that would go to 3rd-graders in Michigan City. Then we showed a copy to Herb Higgin from Safe Harbor, Rebecca Williams from HOPE and Al Whitlow from the Boys & Girls Club, and their response was so enthusiastic that we’re now printing another 1000 copies! It is very gratifying to have that kind of support for such a unique project.”

The activity book is part of the Human Rights program, “Raise Your Standards, Not Your Fists.” Widelski said, “This is a year-long program that includes an essay and poster contest for Martin Luther King Day, presentations made to students, an online bi-monthly newsletter and cultural knowledge ‘test,’ and a youth walk which will take place next spring. We will work to help students and young adults who are from diverse backgrounds and are willing to lead to become peace makers instead of trouble makers.”

####

Contact: Nancy Widelski **Phone:** 219/873-1429 **E-mail:** nancyw@emichigancity.com