

COLONIE Spotlight

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NEWS

The End

The Book Barn, a used bookstore that has been a mainstay in the Latham community for nearly a quarter century, decided to it was time to close shop.

Story on Page 2

New director

After 31 years, local library has a new director in office.

Story on Page 4

INDEX

Cops, courts and calls	2
Sports	5-6
Entertainment	B1-B16
Classifieds	B14-B15
Opinion	10
Crossword	B8
Legals	8

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TOP STORY



The spark for change

Local teens learn the challenges of solving global issues

By EMILY DREW
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LATHAM — After a three-day human rights symposium, area teens will return to school this fall with ideas of starting new clubs, beginning fundraising campaigns and raising awareness.

For the first time, 60 students from seven area high schools gathered at the New York State United Teachers headquarters in Latham for a Capital District symposium. In the program organized by North Colonie School District staff members, students learned about major human rights issues, from the Rwandan Genocide and water crises, to fair trade and human trafficking.

"This is for kids who really want to know more," said Thea MacFawn, North Colonie teacher. She said there are a lot of students interested in human rights, but often feel like they can't make a difference.

MacFawn and fellow teacher Kelly Wetherbee organized the symposium over several months. Officially titled Capital Region Institute for Human Rights 2015 Teen Summer Symposium, it was modeled after other programs MacFawn learned of when she worked with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum on a fellowship last year.

During the program, students from several high schools around the area got the chance to hear from nationally and internationally renowned speakers. Carl Wilkens and Eugenie Mukeshimana spoke of their experiences in the Rwandan Genocide.

As well, Ivan Vannos, a Holocaust survivor, shared his testimony and answered questions students had.

"We were looking for speakers that talk about issues that we felt had very good connections to topics (the students) study in school," said MacFawn. All students, she said, learned of the Holocaust during World War II, but, "We wanted to revive that connection. How is that relevant in the world today?"

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ENTERTAINMENT



Still going crazy

Ann and Nancy Wilson have spent nearly 40 years breaking stereotypes and entertaining rock and roll fans along the way.

Story on Page B1

SPORTS



Nail biters

Two, one-run losses have the Albany Dutchmen hopping last weekend's rainstorms also brought a deluge of offense for the hometown team as they prepare for this week's slate of contests.

Story on Page 5



Eugenie Mukeshimana speaks in front of 60 area high school students about her experience as a Rwandan Genocide survivor at NYSUT for the Capital Region Institute for Human Rights 2015 Teen Summer Symposium.

Photo submitted

From page 1 ... The spark for change

She said the Rwandan Genocide speakers brought the issue back to a modern context. "These ideas, these types of events and types of tragedies, we want the students to think critically about how this happens and pay more attention to these issues," said MacFawn. The students also heard

from other local speakers, like Mark Betrand of The Giving Circle Inc., a not-for-profit organization in Bethlehem. He spoke of involvement in global initiatives. Members of Albany Law School spoke about anti-human trafficking, while MacFawn and fellow North Colonie

teacher Dan Weaver held a session on Syria.

Rory Gerberg, a former Shaker High School student, returned to tell the group about her work in human rights issues.

Current Shaker students also held a panel discussing what is already being done at schools and in the Capital District.

"Our goal here is to inspire leadership with human rights issues. We

want the kids to come here and feel empowered," said Bethlehem teacher Bill Reilly.

In addition to the speakers, students participated in workshops like "Shopping at the Global Mall," where Reilly assigned different students to different countries with annual salaries. The lesson, Reilly said, was to show the teens the difference in currency values, where one student may "buy" steak dinners, while another may not be able to afford necessities.

Students were taught how to develop websites, organize a rally and begin a discussion on human rights topics. A lesson on water scarcity where the students represented different countries along a river basin showed "the complexities of human rights issues, as well as how to address those issues," said Reilly.

Some of the lessons will not be limited to the symposium, though. Reilly said he plans on using the water scarcity activity in his classroom come fall. Shaker High School students will also see a completely new class option: Literature

and Human Rights, co-taught by MacFawn and Wetherbee.

According to MacFawn, the class "Came out of a conversation about engaging students in more current topics, because we do want them to develop into informed citizens. What's beyond Latham, beyond New York State, beyond the United States."

At the symposium, students have already thought of the bigger issues and how to bring them to a local scale. Throughout the three days, the teens developed an "action toolbox" to think of ways to address human rights issues close to their own interests.

Some students came up with ideas to alleviate hunger and stock food pantries. Others thought about helping younger children in elementary school remain interested in education.

One Bethlehem duo wants to advocate for fair trade coffee to be served at Bethlehem High School, modeled after a local coffee shop. "If we work hard enough and long enough, we could move Bethlehem into being a fair trade school," said one student.

Madison of Shaker High School said she wants to start an open mic night, where her peers could sing, read poetry, or do stand-up comedy, and the proceeds could go to different local charities each month.

Another idea developed by students from both Bethlehem and Shaker high schools was a Kan-jam tournament, a game where players try to get Frisbees into bins, which would charge either \$5 or four cans of food for admission. The proceeds would go to a local soup kitchen.

MacFawn said the symposium will develop into an annual event. Already, a follow-up session will happen in October. The students will watch a film and teachers are hoping to get them involved in a service project.

"It's easy to feel helpless," said MacFawn of the students. "But now they've met kids who have the same interests. They can pool ideas and see each other as resources. Together, they can really make a difference and do something about it."

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