

Opinion



Finding common dreams

Crisis in black and white challenges communities

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation has done North Carolina a service by mapping the depth, breadth and shape of racial attitudes among blacks and whites in our state.

The challenge now is to use that map to find our way out of the isolated racial worlds we've created within what ought to be cohesive communities that draw strength from the combination of their diverse parts.

The results of the study of racial attitudes are reported on Page 3 of this issue of the *Philanthropy Journal*. And they're not pretty. The problems of our streets and our schools are closely tied to race. Blacks and whites are quick to see themselves as victims. The

prospect of violent upheaval inhabits our nightmares. And while blacks and whites claim to want to cut through the walls that separate them, neither group knows how.

What's more, blacks and whites have little contact with one another, and when they do, they have a hard time talking straight on race.

In fact, to ensure greater honesty among people who participated in focus groups for the study, the Reynolds Foundation's consultant separated whites from blacks and, further, separated black men from black women. Our collective failure to communicate runs deep.

The dilemma now facing the Reynolds Foundation — and the rest of us — is what to

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do with the comprehensive and disturbing data it has collected. Launching

an initiative that has the primary aim of improving race relations by asking blacks and whites to attend meetings and talk to one another might get people talking and thinking, but to be effective it would have to go beyond preaching to the choir and attract a broad spectrum of the community.

A better idea would be to identify existing efforts that are trying to rebuild communities. Communities are failing for many reasons, not least of which are the anger, misunderstanding and distance between blacks and whites. Yet regardless of their race, people share common

dreams — healthy children, safe streets, effective schools, productive jobs.

Initiatives aimed at making those dreams real are underway throughout North Carolina, and the most promising ones try to pull together the wealth of community resources that often are isolated and unconnected.

The impetus for much of the collaboration that's taking place comes from grassroots nonprofits. Those groups need to be supported to expand their efforts throughout their communities and into other communities.

By tapping and linking their collective resources, our communities can indeed begin to repair themselves and heal our racial wounds.

Nuts and bolts

Don't let fundraising blur mission

Have you ever been frustrated by putting all your effort and experience into a grant request or making a donor-call, only to learn that the funds have been channeled to another organization or individual claiming to do something similar but with little or no experience?

Or, maybe a shortfall in donations leaves you feeling like your only option is to "turn stones into bread." Or maybe you find yourself caught up in the challenge of a new untested idea that is just outside the mission and focus of your organization, but you want to give it a try anyway.

I don't know about others, but when I look at real human needs that require more funds than our agency can provide, and I look at the surrounding wealth, it is real easy to fall into the trap of dreaming and scheming how to increase funds at the expense of paying attention to the "nuts and bolts" of meeting human needs.

In my 12 years of working in emergency assistance with our Christian Ministry, I have seen our agency grow from a food pantry and clothes closet to a full-fledged crisis ministry providing a wide range of financial emergency assistance and other basic necessities such as household furniture items.

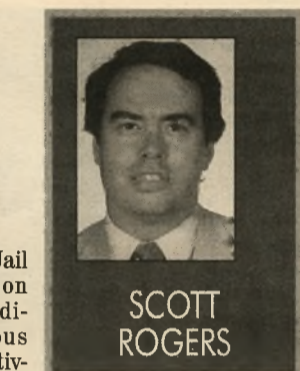
Scott Rogers is executive director of the Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministry.

We have a Jail and Prison Ministry coordinating religious services and activities in the county jail. We have a 90-bed emergency shelter with a focus on employment, vocational rehabilitation, mental health, physical health and meeting spiritual needs. Our Medical Ministry is in its third year of operating a clinic providing access to a wide range of acute services and health education. The support of 200 churches and 2,000 volunteers means that we have to stay very clearly focused on our mission and purpose if we are to meet a wide variety of complex needs.

The generosity exhibited through our churches is also exemplified in the leadership and strength of our human services system throughout Buncombe County. Through an annual assessment of needs, and through the leadership of United Way, city and county government, and corporate and private foundation leaders, we have been building successful coalitions around targeted needs and populations in our community.

Staying focused on the root causes of poverty and injustice, we find ourselves better able to communicate about the needs, to find strength in sharing our resources and to develop long-term models

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SCOTT ROGERS

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Breaking down walls

Turf wars hurt community solutions

Over the years, the A.J. Fletcher Foundation has sponsored several one-day conferences for nonprofit agencies. The main topic of these meetings has been fundraising, but programs have also touched on administrative development, board responsibilities and long-range planning.

To my surprise, more than 500 people attended our last conference, about twice as many as I originally had thought would come. Clearly, there is a strong demand among nonprofits for low-cost, focused "technical assistance."

Reading through evaluations of the most recent conference, however, I realized technical assistance may have been a secondary benefit. What a large number of participants found most helpful was nothing more than the forum we had provided — the infrequent opportunity to communicate and interact with their colleagues. And it's true that a major obstacle for the nonprofit manager, a chief cause of burnout, is that persistent sense of loneliness: "Am I the only one out here?"

Paradoxically, the refreshing camaraderie of large conferences does not always extend to day-to-day operations, especially among nonprofits tackling the same issues. Granted, there are numer-

Tom McGuire is executive director of the A.J. Fletcher Foundation in Raleigh.

ous examples of independent nonprofits working cooperatively to solve community problems.

By the same token, there is undeniable evidence of division and suspicion among some agencies and organizations purporting to serve the same constituencies.

For some, the trend could be explained as "charting a new course;" for others, it's more a case of "protecting turf." Whatever the explanation, it is a phenomenon that should be examined by funders, constituents and — most important — the agencies themselves to determine how joint planning and cooperative efforts can produce the most effective results.

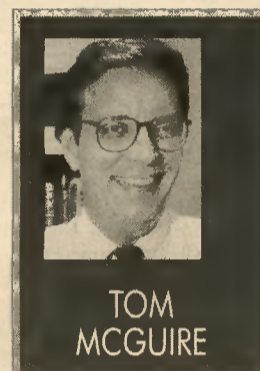
Why should a sense of insularity — "turfism" — exist in any organization whose only purpose

is to serve a community need? On one level, an insular condition results from a lack of knowledge, and thus an inability to communicate. When we don't know what our colleagues are doing, or even that we have colleagues in the field, we cannot share successes, false start or effective ideas with them — ideas that might ultimately benefit us both.

On a more troublesome level, insularity sometimes exists precisely because we do know what our colleagues are doing. Obvious

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TOM MCGUIRE

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EDITOR AND PUBLISHER
TODD COHEN — (919) 829-8989

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT
MARGUERITE LEBLANC — (919) 829-8991

STAFF WRITER
BARBARA SOLOW — (919) 829-8921

Z. SMITH REYNOLDS-JOSEPHUS DANIELS
PHILANTHROPY NEWS FELLOW
KATHERINE NOBLE — (919) 829-8917

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT / DESIGNER
KENNY MONTEITH — (919) 829-8988

INTERNET: tcohen@nando.net

Bill Lee rolling up sleeves for Tar Heel kids

Bill Lee's plan to retire this year as head of Duke Power will make him one of the state's most eligible philanthropists.

In addition to making the Charlotte utility one of the most effective and respected in the U.S., Lee's civic leadership has made a huge difference in his hometown and his state.

Now that he won't be running a power company, he'll have more time to devote to public service. And chances are, he'll be in big demand, particularly on the issues closest to his heart — children and schools.

Lee says he won't decide until next year exactly how he plans to focus his energies. But he's clear about the challenges that North Carolina faces.

"Our challenges can be expressed rather simply, and that's our children," he says. "We just have to do a better job of imparting to our children values and opportunities. We've just got to start, even with prenatal care, in raising succeeding generations that are going to be better than what we've got in society today. Our highest priority is our children in all their

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dimensions."

Leadership is tough to define, and it takes many forms. A leader can lead by example, or by force of will or intelligence, or by knowing how to coax excellence from others.

In his business and civic undertakings, Lee has managed to do all three. An engineer by training, he has been a forceful and intelligent leader of a company he has come to personify. Yet he also is leaving that company with a deep bench of skilled managers to whom he has delegated decision-making authority.

In Charlotte, Lee has enlisted others to make things happen, particularly in the public schools. Three years ago, for example, he assembled a group of business and civic leaders to figure out how to generate community support to improve the public schools there. The result was the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation, which in turn has raised money to support new initiatives in the schools.

Lee says he expects to do something that involves "interacting with children, interacting with the education system at the local or state level, raising money to help solve the problems, trying to involve others in volunteering their time to mentor."

Whatever Lee does, you can be sure he will get things done. And that's good news for North Carolina children.

IDEAS ON STEWARDSHIP

As reported on Page 3 of this issue, The News and Observer Foundation and the *Philanthropy Journal* are planning a statewide conference this fall on stewardship.

The conference will be for boards and staffs of nonprofits and foundations, as well as for people who work in the for-profit and public sectors and have an interest in philanthropy.

As we plan the conference, we'd like to hear your ideas about how to deal with these subjects. If you have a suggestion, please call me at (919) 829-8989.

Todd Cohen