

# "Facing History and Ourselves" seeks to eradicate intolerance, racism and indifference among youth

(Continued from page 1)

genocide, and the complex lessons they teach about racism, anti-Semitism and prejudice in today's world. Founded in 1976, Facing History and Ourselves has trained over 10,000 teachers through its national offices in Boston and its regional offices in New York, Chicago, Memphis, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

In 1991, Ms. Fishman was awarded a grant from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Educational Foundation to attend a Facing History and Ourselves weeklong institute. With the approval of the school system, she began introducing elements of the program into her curriculum. In 1996, her transfer to the Northwest School of the Arts provided even more fertile ground for her teaching. In addition to using Facing History methodology in her literature classes, she was able to introduce a semester elective built around the Facing History curriculum resource book. As much as that pleased her, she began to conceptualize how the program could be brought to all schools.

In June of 1996, her effort to broaden the program was reinforced when Fred Meyer moved to the Charlotte area from Memphis, where for two and a half years he had been very involved in Facing History activities. Together, they have laid a foundation for the introduction of the program into the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. With seed money from the Elie Wiesel Echo Foundation, they were able to hold a two day introductory course in June of 1997 taught by Facing History national staff, and attended by twenty-three middle and high school teachers from public and private schools in the city and county.

The results of the workshop were so positive that the school system requested that Ms. Fishman develop a proposal for two follow-up sessions for the original group of teachers, and another introductory workshop for 25 additional CMS teachers, which was held in February of this year. Included in the proposal was a request for funding to send four teaching teams to a national Facing History training session in Boston this summer. The system

agreed to fund half of the cost of the Boston trip, to fully fund additional workshops and follow-up sessions, and to provide money for reference books and video libraries needed to support the program in six schools.

**"If Hitler could educate the youth to injure the world with hate, through programs like Facing History, we as teachers can teach the youth to heal the world through knowledge and understanding."**

A Facing History teacher

The training provided by Facing History prepares educators to help adolescents develop the skills and knowledge to fully participate and succeed in a democratic society. As the name implies, the program uses history to help students think critically about their behavior and the effect that their actions have on the community. Providing continual training and extensive support to the teachers involved, the organization's overall goal is to ensure that the program is implemented in a way that emphasizes the essential elements while still allowing individual teachers to adapt the program to meet local needs.

While much is being done in the Charlotte community at the adult level to address issues of intolerance and prejudice, the middle and high schools typically have had a more difficult time in knowing how to deal with these concerns. Mr. Meyer feels CMS's early financial commitment to the Facing History effort is recognition of the program's value in addressing these issues. Based on the response of teachers involved in the initial workshops, the program's approach should prove to be of significant benefit to both the schools and broader community.

To cite Ms. Fishman's quote from the February 16 *Charlotte Observer* article, "Part of the program is to get kids to think about what they're

doing. If we can get kids to understand physics and calculus and the intricacies of medieval literature, we certainly can talk to them about their own ability to create a value system, to be part of a democracy, to understand the notion of community and responsibility." Junior class member Emily Dornblazer said, "I think this should be a required course. It teaches compassion and it teaches what life is all about. Life isn't about math or science; it's learning how to get along with people and having good morals so if something like the Holocaust were to come up again, hopefully people will make the right decisions." At a reception after the first workshop, one of the teachers spoke powerfully of what she had experienced: "If Hitler could educate the youth to injure the world with hate, through programs like Facing History, we as teachers can teach the youth to heal the world through knowledge and understanding."

Starting with the issues of stereotyping and the concept of identity, students use their personal journals, essays, poetry, or artwork to communicate their thoughts. Referring to the Holocaust, Ms. Fishman invites students' input by posing the question: "What can one person do to protect human rights?" Citing instances of rescuers who hid Jews and others, as well as heroes of this generation, the students begin to see that one person *can* make a difference.

Drawing from his Memphis experience with Facing History, Mr. Meyer related further examples of issues addressed by this unique program. He described his involvement with a student-planned symposium entitled "Student Journalists and the First Amendment," attended by fifty-six high school students involved in journalism and media work. Meyer also helped Facing History mount the exhibit "Rescuers of the Holocaust," and helped to bring several nationally-known speakers to Memphis classrooms.

Ms. Fishman and Mr. Meyer are excited about the progress the program has made in Charlotte. They are now raising the remaining money needed to send eight teach-

ers to the Boston training session this July. The support of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System and the generosity of the Echo Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, and private donors have provided the fledgling Charlotte Facing History program with critical financial resources. Along with Dr. Cernyak-Spatz's teaching help and workshop space made available by the JCC and Temple Beth El, Ms. Fishman is well on her way to introducing Charlotte students to the powerful message of Facing History and Ourselves.

If you would like further information about the Facing History and Ourselves program, or wish to make a donation to insure the program's continuing expansion in Charlotte area schools, please contact Jackie Fishman at 364-5677 or Fred Meyer at 483-6363 or 483-5658. ☆

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## Marcia Simon honored as 1997 Woman of the Year

In March, Marcia W. Simon was honored, along with Cyndee G. Patterson, as 1997 Woman of the Year.

As co-recipient of this honor, Marcia was chosen for a number of reasons, ranging from her commitment to the arts and education to her work in the faith community. She has long been dedicated to serving people in all walks of life.

Marcia's recent success with the lesser known Summit House, which assists women offenders and their children, illustrates the breadth of her generosity. She raised \$225,000 for the organization. Her leadership has helped Summit House blossom into an organization that has won a national Presidential Award. Marcia is the Chair of Summit House of Charlotte.

Marcia's association with the Arts & Science Council has been notable over the years. A member of the Board of Directors for more than 15 years, she was the recipient of the 1997 Spirit Award, bestowed by the retiring board of Spirit Square. Marcia also helped lay the foundation for the Museum of the New South.

In other areas, Marcia has served as a Board Member for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation, and has also been a leader in organizations such as the Junior League, Planned Parenthood, the United Way and



the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, among others.

The Woman of the Year Award was first given in 1955 by WBT Radio of Charlotte. When WBT ended their sponsorship of the award in 1991, the former honorees decided to continue the event as a self-supporting group.

Dr. Bonnie Cone, Woman of the Year in 1956, serves as Chairperson Emeritus, while the most recent winners take responsibility for logistics.

Past winners of the Woman of the Year Award include Judy Rose in 1996; Mary Lou Babb and Theresea Elder in 1995; Sis Kaplan in 1994; Martha B. Alexander in 1993; Sarah Stevenson in 1992; Dr. Ruth G. Shaw in 1991; and Susan Hancock in 1990. ☆

## The deadline for the combined June/July issue is May 1.

Deadline for the August issue is July 1.

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