

Improving relations starts with 'genuine desire'

By Erica Bryant

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Editor's note: This is a profile of Bridget-Anne Hampden, a participant in the May 31 People of Prominence discussion of race in Charlotte.

Hampden is president and CEO of JHR & Associates LLC. EB - When were you first aware that because of your skin color people might

treat you differently.

BH - My adolescent years were spent in my home country - Guyana, South America - where there was tension between Afro Guyanese and Indo Guyanese (people of East Indian descent).

Our village was predominantly Indian. As race relations became tense, some of the Indians threatened to

burn our house down.

I remember being extremely scared and my father sitting at the bottom of the house with a lamp burning the entire night trying to deter the attackers.



Hampden

When I was about 27, I took a job as a consultant with a software firm in the U.S. When I conducted on the job training for senior executives, I was surprised to discover how oblivious the white folks were of me as they filed into the room. Those who chose to speak would ask me questions about the coffee and would openly share their frustration about having to attend the session.

You could imagine their shock and embarrassment when they found out I was the trainer! This happened time and time again.

EB - Please share an incident that the public might find surprising.

BH - While I was at

Wachovia, one of my white male direct reports once came in for his weekly one-on-one meeting. As was the custom, he sat in the chair in front of my desk and I sat in my seat behind my desk. Before we began, he blurted out: "You know, I think you should get up from your seat and come and sit in the seat beside me. That would then make us equal."

I was quite stunned by his comment but thought quickly enough to respond "unfortunately we are not equal - YOU work for ME and as such I will sit in my chair and you will sit over there!"

EB - Give one suggestion to improve racial trust in our area.

BH - We, as a race, are a

very perceptive people. Therefore it is easy for us to determine when an individual is not authentic. I think there is an opportunity for benevolence to be more than monetary gifts.

It should also be a sharing of talents and opportunities. It seems to me that there is, in some cases, a feigned interest in our causes or issues; however there is not a genuine desire to improve the welfare of African Americans.

The big deals or contracts are still given primarily to whites while we fall into the "minority purchasing program" and end up with a few thousands rather than a few million!

A matter of trust for Charlotte

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ence was made all heads in the classroom would turn to me. There are numerous additional instances, but these stand out. By the way, my sister and I were consistently graded high honor roll.

EB - Please share an example of an interracial or intra-racial dynamic that exists (or an incident that occurred) in your current position among professional peers/staff/co-workers that the public might find surprising.

HJ - An email I received from a citizen

upset over a budget recommendation who referred to me as a "black joke" in his home and a Stepin' Fetchit pawn of a Democratic board of commissioners.

EB - Give one suggestion that you think would help to improve racial trust in our area.

HJ - Heed the words of Dr. King: "If we don't learn to live together as brothers and sisters, we will perish as fools."

Join the discussion at Center Stage, 2315 North Davidson St. on May 31 at 6:30 p.m. Call The Post at (704) 376-0496 for details.

LOVE OF LEARNING'S FINAL GRADUATION



PHOTO/CHARLENE PRICE-PATTERSON

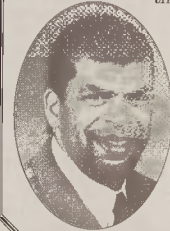
Pi Class of the Love of Learning program took their final group photo during graduation ceremonies Saturday at Davidson College. Love of Learning, which ended with the graduation, was a college preparation program that also instilled wholistic values of self-worth.

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