

Student Leadership Conference

By Pat Johnson



Student Leadership Conference
Photo credit: Ocean County.

The third Ocean County Student Leadership Conference will be held November 14th at Ocean County College's Grunin Center for the Arts. The conference brings students from Ocean County middle and high schools together to learn how to confront racial and bias hate in their schools and community, said Keith Krivitzky Managing Director of the Jewish Federation of Ocean County. "The genesis of the effort is to find effective ways to combat hate in our communities. The thought is that we

want to inoculate against these societal ills and how do we do that? This is part of the prescription," explained Krivitzky. "We teach them to be 'upstanders,'--not to stand by when they see someone being bullied or hurt. We empower them to stand up and defend others—that's the idea behind it."

The half-day of learning begins with a series of keynote speakers and then students participate in various break-out sessions. "These are more personal, more hands-on" said Krivitzky.

The students are selected by their administration or teachers --it could be a whole class, depending on the subject. So far, the consortium has held two conferences that have packed the 460-seat Grunin Center for the Arts at Ocean County College (OCC).

"It's held twice a year and over time more students will be touched by this, and teachers also," said Krivitzky.

This conference is underpinned by other efforts to teach the importance of respecting cultural differences. "The Jewish Federation also offers teacher trainings on how to combat hate and field trips are offered through schools to visit the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights and Genocide Education (Chhange) nonprofit" at Brookdale County College.

Dr. Henry Jackson Director of Academic Success for Ocean County College and alternate member on the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission said last year the two keynote speakers at the conference were readily appreciated by the students. At the first conference, Pastor Chris Edmonds, son of Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds, shared his father's experiences as a World War II prisoner of war incarcerated in Hesse, Germany. When the Germans attempted to separate the Jewish prisoners of war from the rest of the Americans, MSgt. Edmonds refused, stating, in solidarity, "We are all Jews here." His actions saved the lives of over 200 Jewish soldiers. Edmonds also read excerpts from his father's wartime journals. The second conference welcomed Arno Michaelis of the Forgiveness Project. "He was a former skinhead who said all he wanted to do as a young man was drink eighteen beers and fight. Then he had a daughter and that changed his life. He said he thought, 'What If my daughter Googled my name and saw all this bad stuff—I had to change.'"

Dr Jackson has had his own experience with racism as he grew up in Prince George's County, Maryland (the last state in

Student Leadership continued...

the Union to desegregate) in an all-black neighborhood. After some juvenile missteps, Jackson went on to college and the Marine Corps. “I’ve seen what the world is—most of the students in Ocean County never have to leave their county. They have the world come to them between Memorial Day and Labor Day—but that world looks very much different once you step outside of Ocean County,” he noted.

“I consider myself lucky as I figured out that education is the way up.” He earned his bachelor’s from Howard University, a Historically Black College, masters from Columbia University and Doctorate from San Diego State University. As the Executive Director of Academic Success for the past 8 years, he has been at the college for 12 years, he is one of few black male administrators at Ocean County College.

In that capacity, Dr. Jackson administers the College Readiness Now program for first generation, low income, at-risk students paid for through a grant from the New Jersey Council of Community Colleges and the state secretary of higher education. He also administers the academic component of the Early College/College Academy program. Jackson said he has instituted this program in every high school in the county. “It’s an early learning program, where students take college courses to earn credits—it’s a college in itself with 2,200 high school students.”

In 2022, he was asked to help put together the Student Leadership Conference and he willingly agreed.

“We have to speak to diversity and equality. Lots of times, white students don’t see other students, students of color. Ocean County is becoming more diverse but there are pockets where people are still isolated, I hope they learn that life is more than just the



9:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Be an Up-stander

There is no room for hate in Ocean County. This conference will bring students together to share experiences and inspire one another to stamp out hate in any of its forms and wherever it appears.

Free to Attend

To apply for a bus stipend please email the completed request form and an invoice from your transportation provider to thart@co.ocean.nj.us. Requests must be submitted by October 31, 2023.

Sponsored by:

Ocean County Board of Commissioners
Virginia E. Haines, Chairwoman of the
Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission

The Jewish Federation
of Ocean County

people you hang around with.”

“My other reason for working with this group is to help our students understand that ‘difference is not synonymous with deficient.’ Many times when individuals encounter something that is diverse than what they are familiar with (i.e. different) they immediately assume that there is some type of deficiency associated with it and that it must be bad. That’s a learned behavior and if we can move the needle and change that way of thinking, I think we can go a long way with changing people’s knee jerk reactions as well as impact our views of the world.”

The Ocean County Prosecutor’s office has recently installed traffic signs that state, “Hate Has No Place in Ocean County” at various intersections in various towns.

The Conference is sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Ocean County and the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission and partners with the Ocean County College, Ocean County Prosecutor’s Office, Chhange at Brookdale, and the Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Right at OCC.

Schools interested in attending the conference should contact Ocean County Cultural & Heritage at thart@co.ocean.nj.us or (732) - 929 - 4779