



# news release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**\*\*\* REVISED TO REFLECT CHANGE IN LOCATION FOR NOON SESSION**

## **DIVERSITY EXPERT TO GIVE FORUM ON PREJUDICE AND BIGOTRY**

**Event sponsored by Human Rights Commission and local schools**

An internationally acclaimed teacher and lecturer will speak about racism, prejudice, homophobia and the class system in America on Thursday, Oct. 18, in a special educational forum developed by the Westchester County Human Rights Commission and supported by several local school districts.

The free educational program, "*Courageous Conversations: An Evening with Jane Elliot,*" will be given in two sessions. This collaborative event, involving the Pleasantville, Briarcliff Manor and Pocantico Hills school districts, will include County Executive Andy Spano and the mayor and supervisors of those communities.

**The first session, which is open to teachers, educators, school administrators and other faculty or school personnel, will be at noon at Pleasantville High School, 60 Romer Ave. The second session will be at 7 p.m. at Briarcliff Manor Middle School on Pleasantville Road and is open to parents, clergy, community leaders and the public.** Both sessions will address the anatomy of prejudice and issues of racism and bigotry.

The forum was developed as the result of issues of discrimination and racist behavior that were brought to the attention of the Westchester County Human Rights Commission. In two incidents, the discriminatory behavior was conducted by teenagers. One of the requests of the individuals who were the target and subject of the racist behavior was that the county find a way to really impact and educate the community and the children about the importance of humanity and diversity.

Jane Elliott, a noted educator and diversity trainer, gained notoriety as a teacher by engaging her class in

**MORE**

## PAGE 2 – HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM

the controversial exercise of “*Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes*” after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. more than 30 years ago. This exercise focused on exploring and exposing the basis of inferior and superior attitudes. Although at that time she was ostracized, hated and fired from her teaching position, her exercise had a dramatic affect on all who were exposed to it and subsequently became the subject of the Peabody Award – winning film “*The Eye of the Storm.*”

Delores Scott Brathwaite, executive director of the Human Rights Commission, said that inviting Elliot to speak seemed a perfect way to address the county’s desire to raise a public discussion about racist issues.

“When I discussed this with Donald Antonecchia, superintendent of the Pleasantville School District, he was immediately in favor of joining with the Commission to do whatever was necessary to accomplish this task,” Brathwaite said. “Dr. Antonecchia then broadened the scope of this program by inviting neighboring school districts to be a part of this educational initiative.”

She noted that having Jane Elliott come and speak about tearing down the barriers of prejudice and racism that divide us as human beings is a significant commentary on how serious Westchester County is about not tolerating discrimination of any kind.

Admission is free. For further information contact the Westchester County Human Rights Commission at (914) 995-7710.