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During the small group portion of the event, participants were asked to answer the following questions: What are the most critical issues facing the Jamestown community concerning the integration, accommodation and acculturation of the Hispanic community? What are the biggest barriers to addressing these issues in a productive manner? What are the biggest opportunities to address these issues in a productive manner? Several groups broke off to brainstorm, and then came back together to discuss their thoughts.

P-J photos by Katrina Fuller

Hispanic Connection Action Team Forum Focuses On Solutions, Objectives

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Rather than waiting on someone else to solve issues the Hispanic community is facing, a group of community members, leaders and others took a more proactive approach.

Hosted by the Hispanic Connection Action Team, a community forum allowed a variety of individuals to meet at the Lillian Ney Renaissance Center on Saturday to share ideas and tackle challenges the Hispanic community is facing in the area.

From government officials and clergy to residents and education officials, people from every walk of life

gave of their time to try to make life in the area a little bit better.

Kyle Reyes, Utah Valley University chief diversity officer and consultant, helped to facilitate a day of community conversation, priority identification and more.

“Today, we’re bridge building, but not in the traditional sense,” Reyes said as he addressed the crowded room. “A bridge is usually coming together in the middle. Once we meet in the middle, we can cross over freely forever.”

He first gave his background to introduce himself to the crowd.

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"My mom is Hawaiian-Japanese, and my father is from the Philippines," Reyes said, adding his father is Spaniard-Filipino. "I want you to know where I am coming from when I facilitate these conversations. I grew up as a graffiti artist."

He said he focused on his artwork as a youth because he felt he wasn't very good at anything else. It all started because of a test in his elementary school years.

"In the third grade, I took a test and that test for some reason defined me for the next seven years. I took the test, and the teacher presented the results," Reyes said, adding rankings were shown by number according to last names. "We all knew who were the first ones, and the Zs were the last ones. They would post the results of the test publicly for the whole class to see and there was a red line every time."

He said if students' grades fell below the red line, it meant they had to do better.

"In third grade, I started to drop below that red line and it seemed like a losing streak in my mind. In my mind I was a stupid child, and the only thing I excelled in was art," Reyes said.

However, in tenth grade, he said he received a ray of hope in an unforeseen manner.

As he sat in class one day, he hid his notebook under his text book and sketched whenever the teacher wasn't paying attention. Soon after, the teacher left the room and he blatantly began drawing.

"All of a sudden, I sensed her there behind me," Reyes said, adding he did what any good graffiti artist would do, dropped his pencil and raised his hands. "I was waiting for a response, but instead, she came and looked over my shoulder. She said, 'How long have you been doing artwork?'"

He said that was the first time anyone had thought his drawings were art, which reframed his thoughts and ideas.

Reyes said the group had a similar purpose for gathering Saturday — to learn how to reframe their thoughts and viewpoints.

He said experiences create connections made in the brain which can place people in categories.

"These synaptic connections create the schema of where people fit and don't fit," Reyes said. "In order for me to change that schema, I have to have 10 positive experiences for every negative experience."

He posed three questions to the participants which they were to discuss in break-away groups: what are the most critical issues facing the Jamestown community concerning the integra-

tion, accommodation and acculturation of the Hispanic community? What are the biggest barriers to addressing these issues in a productive manner? What are the biggest opportunities to address these issues in a productive manner?

The groups broke off into discuss to answer each question, and then came back together over lunch to consolidate their ideas. Then, each member voted on which ideas were most important.

The top ideas were then divide amongst the small groups to develop goals.

Reyes said after all is said and done, he will produce a report and return it to the Hispanic Connection Action Team.

"It will become the first part of a strategic plan," he said. "It becomes a call to action. We all assume we're doing this to help the Hispanic community, and we are, but this helps everyone."

Max Martin, Hispanic Connection Action Team chair, said Reyes is a blessing for the community.

"His mind set feels like an awakening," Martin said. "I felt like I was alone in the desert, but now I feel like I'm no longer in the desert. There is something coming out of this because they eyes are opening, the ears are hearing and the community is involved."

Jennifer Gibson, co-chair of the Strategic Planning and Partnership Commission, said she is glad to see the community getting active in making the area better.

"The overall goal is to create a welcoming-to-all Jamestown," Gibson said. "We have a growing Hispanic community which hasn't been integrated, and it came to the forefront over the concerns over the Eastside YMCA. We wanted to begin the conversations first hand, get input and bring everyone into the fold."

She said this is only the first step, which she hopes will be the first of many.

"We're very action oriented," Gibson said. "We will be looking to partner with people in the Hispanic community."

Reyes said the situation is much like a story told by Sir Ken Robinson during a Ted Talk. He said Robinson described how Death Valley was a barren area in which nothing could grow, so no one tried to cultivate anything.

"Then, all of the sudden, they had three inches of rain out of nowhere," he said, adding afterward, various blooms and foliage sprang up. "The seeds were always there, they just needed nurturing and care. That's what we're trying to do here."