



## **Annual Martin Luther King Day Celebration - January 15**

### *Minett Professor Peter Jemison to Give Keynote Address*

The annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, his legacy and ideals takes place on Tuesday, January 15 at 4 p.m. in Ingle Auditorium. This year's presenter will be RIT's newest Minett Professor G. Peter Jemison, who will weave the ideals of peace and justice throughout his presentation, *Dr. King's Dream of Equal Opportunity and America's Record 40 Years Later*.

Jemison will discuss Dr. King's historic and influential *I Have A Dream* speech and the realities of America's action toward peace at home and abroad. He will include the beliefs of the Haudenosaunee people of the Seneca Indian nation, of whom Jemison belongs.

*"Dr. King believed in non-violence; he advocated for the power of love to bring about social change. War versus the message of peace impacted Dr. King's life and brought tremendous pressure to bear upon him and his work, yet he did not shy away from his belief. Where are the individuals with the courage necessary to stand up and take action to bring about change in our community and the world? Haudenosaunee belief includes the concept that man naturally desires peace. However if any group of people anywhere believes that they do not have justice then you cannot have peace. Who today carries on Dr. King's work? No single individual can do it all. What is the agency of change in the 21st century - are you a part of that work?"*

The community is invited to a reception with Jemison following the presentation in the Fireside Lounge.

## **CDO Update: Diversity Initiatives Touch all Levels of RIT**

### *Dr. Alfreda Brown, Chief Diversity Officer*

Diversity initiatives have focused on several key areas in the last year – from benchmarking and assessment, to retention efforts and community building among campus peers. The direction has come about with commitment from all levels of RIT.

#### **Administrative Leadership**

The senior-level Executive Diversity Council was established recently by President Destler and consists of the president, Janet Sansone, RIT Board of Trustees; Dr. Stanley McKenzie; provost, Dr. James Watters, sr. vice president for Finance & Administration;

Dr. Jim Miller, sr. vice president for Enrollment Management & Career Services; and Dr. Mary Beth Cooper, vice president for Student Affairs. The group will monitor RIT's progress in reaching the broad goal of attracting a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff to the RIT community. Also established was the Council on Diversity and Inclusion, consisting of campus-wide representatives charged with developing all resources and data that RIT will benchmark against. Work began by looking at many areas including recruitment and retention, curriculum and career preparation, the administration of a climate study, and preparing a university scorecard.

In 2008 leadership will focus on the development of an Equity Scorecard for RIT. The University's diversity strategic goal states: "RIT will facilitate a campus climate where the value of diversity and its importance in creating a sense of community is recognized and appreciated." There are two diversity strategic objectives that align with the Equity Scorecard Project: "RIT will continue to support and expand the university's programs to diversify and build community," and "RIT will continue to review the status of women." The underrepresented populations of African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans and women at RIT are the focus areas of the Equity Scorecard project. We are committed to fostering a campus environment where human differences are not only recognized and appreciated, but leveraged to achieve the highest level of performance.

The scorecard, a diversity assessment tool, is designed for higher education to narrow the achievement gap for specific populations, resulting in equitable outcomes for those historically underrepresented. Baseline data are provided, metrics and timelines are established, and results will be monitored by the leadership of the colleges and divisional units. Individualized improvement goals will be established and each college and division will be held accountable for achieving diversity-based equitable outcomes. Data and information will be shared with campus through forums, meetings with governance groups and college/department meetings. RIT's commitment to diversity is firm as we make an impact on the global economy as well as our more personal global village.

## **Global Leadership Certificate Program - Second Year**

*New program added to RIT Leadership Institute*

With the recent news of RIT - Dubai, the University's latest foray into the 'global village', our ability to connect with individuals of another culture for academics, business, and a sense of community is more important than ever. One way for RIT students to make this important step is through the RIT Leadership Institute (RITLI). The Global Leadership Certificate Program, the newest certificate program in the RITLI, opened its second year with more participants and equal enthusiasm.

"The program was created a year ago to help students prepare for communicating, working, learning, and living within the rich cultures around the globe," said Sandy Whitmore, assistant

to the chief diversity officer. Along with Molly McGowan, director of the Leadership Institute, Whitmore developed the program designed to provide students with the tools to be effective leaders, communicate well cross-culturally, and to understand the role of culture in decision-making.

The program consists of three components: mentoring, global awareness, and leadership. Students are partnered with another student from a different ethnic or cultural background and with a faculty/staff member. The three members meet several times over the course of the academic year to discuss issues around leadership, understanding cultures, stereotypes, and how to resolve barriers in communication.

“In the last several years, we tried to get students involved in the Partnerships in Pluralism Program,” said Whitmore. “With their class and work schedules, they could not often attend the different cluster meetings. We wanted to include them in the diversity programs and they wanted to be involved in order to have a chance to discuss some of the diversity issues they were facing day-to-day. We just had to adjust the program to better meet their time schedules.”

Leadership Institute workshops take place in the evenings, on weekends, and on occasion, during a quarter break. This allows for the meetings between students and their faculty or staff mentor to take place between classes, or on lunch hours during the week. As with many of the Leadership Institute programs, the edge given to the students completing certificates is two-fold. “They learn communication, negotiation, cultural skills, and information that will serve them both personally and professionally,” Whitmore added.

See <http://www.rit.edu/leadership> for more information.

## **Partnerships in Pluralism Broadens Cultural Understanding**

Cultural differences are both reality and perception. Individuals view cultures not their own as different, mysterious, and sometimes in a positive or negative light. As RIT’s Partnerships in Pluralism Program enters its fourth year, it has become a way to bridge reality and perception. Bringing together diverse faculty and staff for one-on-one conversations about who they are as individuals, participants gain a perspective on how each make up the cultural fabric of a global village like RIT.

With more than 80 partners in the first year of the program, Partnerships in Pluralism continues to grow and reach many. More than 170 people have completed the program and 50 more will participate this year. The interaction takes place in large group sessions, smaller working groups with sets of pairs and coaches, and individual pair meetings. For bi-monthly meetings the pairs are given talking points as conversation starters and, as they progress through the program, they will pass through four phases designed to explore more in depth topics surrounding diversity, their differences and similarities.

Partners are selected each year based on race/ethnicity, department affiliation, job position, faculty rank and discipline and care is taken to match similar functions or status. Participants volunteer for the year-long program that allows learning to unfold over time while answering the questions: who are we, where are we, where do we want to be, and what will we do as individuals and with others to make a difference?

Ultimately, making a difference is the goal. The pairs will have the opportunity in a safe, confidential format, to explore differences at a deeper level. Sometimes stereotypes are believed as truths, and with information from personal stories, understanding and time, the stereotypes can be diminished. "It is early in the process for me but I am already enjoying the meetings with my partner, Sonia," said current participant, Stacy DeRooy, a member of RIT Public Safety team. "We have begun to explore some deep topics and it's all about being open and accepting. I have great expectations and look forward to the growth of our friendship."

The Partners in Pluralism program is an enriching experience for faculty and staff. The program has grown year after year, some returning as coaches to new participant groups. Each successive group broadens the circle of influence and inclusion.

## **Commission Begins 2008 - New Name and Renewed Commitment**

RIT has a long history of recognizing the contributions and strengths of its culturally-rich students, faculty, and staff. Out of that richness grew the Commission for Promoting Pluralism. The Commission launches into 2008 with a new name –**President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion**, but equally strong in its direction for including and recognizing strength in diversity.

After nearly 15 years, Commission programs, events, and scholarships have become important to the campus-at-large. The name change reflects the growth of the organization under the umbrella of the new position of chief diversity officer. It will continue its mission of ensuring that people have an understanding of how they will work, live, and learn within the global village.

President Destler spoke with Commission chairman, Thomas Warfield recently about his views on diversity at RIT, the role of the Commission and some anecdotes about how diversity has touched his life personally:

**Thomas Warfield:** Diversity is a new "buzz" word today; does it name a new way of thinking and lead to a new way of interaction or has it become so passé and meaningless for most people to take it seriously?

**Dr. Destler:** *The word "diversity" is usually employed to advocate for a tolerant, inclusive, accepting community that respects and celebrates the differences between people of different races, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations. It is this inclusiveness that brings power to the word, and it is the characteristic which I embrace most personally.*

**TW:** What might you say to those who see the diversity perspective as a way of avoiding the really difficult issues we face such as racism, sexism, homophobia and able-ism?

**Dr. Destler:** *One cannot work for a more diverse community without confronting these challenges, and one cannot honestly advocate for diversity without recognizing the work that needs to be done to address these issues.*

**TW:** Can you tell us how diversity has played a role in your career and/or personal life?

**Dr. Destler:** *My father was fired from what is now Georgia Southern University in the late 1930's for advocating the admission of African-Americans. His example, which I learned about only when I became*

*an adult has taught me that one person's actions, taken together with those of many others, can eventually make a difference in our shared pursuit of a more equitable society. I am committed to do my part to help build a model of an equitable diverse community at RIT.*

**TW:** Pluralism is about creating a culture where each individual can thrive and contribute as a valued member of a larger community. In what ways do you see RIT as a leader in building a more welcoming pluralistic campus?

**Dr. Destler:** *RIT has much to be proud of in this area, but much remains to be done. We need to work on minority employee and student retention issues, to hold managers accountable over time for building a more diverse community, and we need to do more to ensure that faculty, staff, and, most importantly, students benefit from the diversity of our campus.*

**TW:** What do you see as the most challenging aspects and complexities of an increasingly diverse academic community and what steps do you think need to be taken to meet such challenges here at RIT?

**Dr. Destler:** *RIT is still an institution with a technical focus, and attracting minority students to technical fields remains a challenge. One way of addressing this problem over the long term is for us to become more involved in the K-12 sector. Another way is for RIT to improve the retention of our minority faculty, staff, and student populations, thereby sending a message to these communities that they can succeed here.*

**DIVERSITY PERSPECTIVES** is published quarterly by the chief diversity officer, in conjunction with RIT's President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion. Information about the publication, the deadlines for article submissions and comments about content may be addressed to the editors, in care of the Chief Diversity Officer, Office of the President and Commission for Promoting Pluralism, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, New York 14623-5604; 585-475-5453 or 585-475-5700.

More information about diversity initiatives at RIT and programs sponsored by the CDO and President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion can be found at: [www.diversity.rit.edu](http://www.diversity.rit.edu)

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