

Implicit Bias workshop aids Lafayette police, residents

By Pippa Fisher



Residents and city staff listen to the presentation. Photo Pippa Fisher

Residents have an overall positive view of the Lafayette Police Department but there were still some people who felt that the concepts of implicit bias and all of its implications have not yet been embraced by members of the Lafayette community.

Those were the results of a survey of a recent workshop held on implicit bias, referring to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Not a seat was empty at the event, "Implicit Bias and Procedural Justice Community Education and Engagement Night" presented by Christy Chandler and Shanti Brien of Daylight Justice and hosted by the Crime Prevention Commission and Lafayette Chief of Police Eric Christensen.

The program's objective was designed to increase public engagement and trust of local police. Through a series of slide shows, the leaders presented ideas for discussion in small groups. Based on the tenet that if you are human, you are biased, they tried to get conversation started to become aware of one's biases and to help come up with ways to counter them.

Christensen has said that "The more we talk about our difficult issues, the more likely we are to solve them." And the conversations at this workshop did indeed reflect how difficult the issues are with several heated exchanges.

A police officer made the point that, although he usually feels very supported, he has experienced bias against him and the uniform he wears, which in turn prompted a comment from a Lafayette resident that as a police officer he can go home and take the uniform off. As an African American, he cannot take off the color of his skin. The resident said he personally had had nothing but positive interactions with the Lafayette Police.

This was a sentiment shared by many, although not all. One resident reported being racially profiled on a couple of occasions within the city, which drew some defensive and heated dialog from others in the room.

One of the more interesting comments came from a resident who made the point that white people don't understand "white privilege" because they have never had to question it or think about it, and black people don't understand why white people don't understand white privilege – a comment that clearly demonstrated the complexity of the issues and the need for such a workshop.

Said Christensen, "It's a hard topic to talk about and you saw that in the interactions during the event. I think the critical thing for all of us is to listen to the perspective of others and appreciate what they felt, not try to impose our own perspective on them."

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Residents pull together for annual creek clean-up

By Pippa Fisher



From left: Will Elder and Jeff Gilman Photo Pippa Fisher

Lafayette Creekside Park — lately a place of controversy between neighbors — provided a great opportunity for residents to pull (weeds) together on a warm and pleasant day at a shady, beautiful stretch of the creek.

This was part of the fifth annual Lafayette Creek Day, where residents old and young gathered to help with the cleanup and learn more about the Las Trampas Creek.

Under blue, sunny skies, the volunteers dug, chopped, hacked and pulled at the invasive, non-native weeds that are choking out more desirable native plant growth to help maintain a stable creek bank.

Several members of the Lafayette Creeks Committee took part, joined by Lafayette residents and several Boy Scouts from troops 200 and 243, who used the opportunity to help as part of a service project

Although the many hands made for faster clearing, the day was also about education. Will Elder, Creeks

Committee Chairman and Jeff Gilman, creeks committee member had displays out depicting the creek's native plants.

Saint Mary's Aquatic Ecologist Michael Marchetti, himself a former creeks committee member, brought several tanks containing examples of the creek's native aquatic life, such as newts and encouraged residents to touch and examine the wildlife.

Stanley Middle School science teachers Jan Winter and Mandy Kush were also helping at the park.

Kush recognizes what a wonderful resource Lafayette has on its doorstep. She says that she brings her seventh-grade students down to the creek several times during the year to observe and take water samples for analysis during their year-long creek study.

Elder expects to present the commission's Downtown Creeks Preservation, Restoration and Development plan to the Lafayette City Council in June.

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