

Peace Learning Center Teaches Peace Skills

(posted Oct 14)

Mayor Bart Peterson commended Peace Learning Center's founders Tim Nation and Charlie Wiles for bringing peace to the youth at the Oct 13 celebration of its ten year anniversary. It's an accomplishment to teach more than 60,000 students the skills of peaceful behavior. Nation and Wiles started the Peace Learning Center through their observation that the youth are not equipped to deal with conflict. More than 60,000 children have now passed through the center to learn how to deal with conflicts to prevent harboring anger that could lead to violence. Wiles explained by working through conflict, it creates a better understanding.

"Peace Learning Center is not anti-violence per se. I often get questions like after the Columbine shootings. That is not our focus," he said. "Peace Learning Center programs are more of a preemptive measure against violence so those types of situations would not come about," he said.

The Mayor used the word "audacious" to describe the two men's bold adventure to teach peace to the youth through conflict resolution, community building and positive behavior programs. "I was attracted to the practical work they were doing to end violence. They were doing something that nobody else was doing," he said.

Wiles was inspired to offer conflict resolution programs to the youth through his work with Ameri-Corp with domestic violence shelters. He discovered the children lacked skills to deal with conflict and little programming was available to address the need. Nation noted that he was inspired to start conflict resolution from living in the area of 24th and Delaware Street. He saw the neighborhood children struggle with the prevalence of violence. "Conflict resolution is the missing link to helping society," he said.

Nation depicted the violence that society is exposed to through TV and videos as "depressing." He said "how many gruesome and sadistic ways can CSI think to murder". Society is growing numb toward the violence and parents should become more active in selection of entertainment their children are watching.

The Mayor acknowledged that much of the Peace Learning

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Sisters Grace and Aubrie Marker with Mayor Peterson

Photos by Linda Karn



Tim Nation



Charlie Wiles with Mayor Peterson

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Center's mission to stop modeling the negative behavior "dovetailed" with his efforts to protect the youth of violent videos through the "Violence in Video Games Ordinance" that would have prohibited children from playing violent video games unless supervised by a parent.

The Mayor was disappointed that the ordinance was struck down by the court as a First Amendment violation. He noted other communities have tried similar ordinances and they too were struck down by the courts.

The Peace Learning Center's Eagle Creek Park location happened as a result of a day of cross-country skiing in the park. It wasn't until Nation and Wile happened to ski pass the old J. K. Lilly Jr.'s house nestled along the reservoir that they decided this should be the location for the Peace Learning Center. Nation said they approached the Indy Parks about renovation. He said there had been discussion of demolishing the building, but they convinced Indy Parks they could resurrect it. At the celebration, Joe Wynns, director of Indy Parks, called watching the Peace Learning Center's efforts to introduce peace to the youth gratifying. He contended the center complemented the Indy Park's initiative to encourage the youth to connect to nature and the outdoors.

Wiles and Nation have relied on over 200 Ameri-Corp workers as staff to teach peace. He said the Ameri-Corp is a President Clinton initiative that was reworked from President George H. Bush's Thousand Points of Light. He said the workers give 1,600 hours of community work for a small stipend and scholarship money toward education.

Nation explained when the doors first open it was geared to serving Indianapolis Public Schools' fourth graders, but now the program has expanded to include two other locations, Lawrence and Columbus. The Peace Learning Center now serves township schools and parochial schools.

Nation indicated that survey results show the programs are effective.

Eighty three percent of teachers have witnessed students using conflict resolution to end disputes and seventy-one percent of teachers reported that they have seen a reduction in bullying and name calling.

"The students are learning the skills," Nation said.

The Mayor acknowledged that "we all have a little ugliness in us sometimes", but the Peace Learning Center is teaching peace one person at a time. The Mayor noted that to eliminate violence

peace has to begin within us as individuals. The Peace Learning Center "gives us that hope," he explained.

John Gibson, President of Earth Charter of Indiana, came to the anniversary celebration to observe. Earth Charter is devoted to caring for the Mother Earth with environmental steward programs. Gibson explained a sustainable Earth can only happen if there is peace within.

"Peace within and on the Earth are intertwined," he said.