

Affirmative Action panel seeks to make bigger strides

The Affirmative Action Advisory Committee (AAAC) has made tremendous strides since its retreat in August 2002. [Greg Walton](#), Program Manager of Organizational and Skill Development at the University of Connecticut-School of Social Work, led the retreat. The Committee began with a brainstorming session to develop a mission statement with the objective of promoting a diverse, discriminatory-free work environment.

The mission:to monitor and promote a vision that ensures a work environment that values all employees; advocates for cultural awareness, tolerance, respect, and inclusion of all cultural perspectives, disavows discrimination and harassment toward any employee; and will pursue all employment practices and policies of the MDC to afford equitable employment opportunities for all.

Since the retreat, the AAAC has formalized this mission statement, conducted the first session of race study circles, and has worked to open the lines of communication across the organization. The AAAC members have been communicating updates and concerns through the Pipeline, at the 2002 Health Fair Survey booth and through the MDC website. The AAAC sponsored the 2003 Study Circle Action Forum, conducted the first Pilot Study Circle on Race Relations, and conducted its meetings in various work locations with invitations to employees to address the committee.

Walton attended the AAAC's May meeting to obtain updates on the committee's progress. "The AAAC's mission statement (should be) available to every employee, so that employees will understand what the AAAC is all about," he said.

Walton also suggested creating a zero-tolerance statement and a diversity symposium for all employees and outside groups. He said he was impressed with the work of the AAAC but said there was more to do.

Anthony Palermino, MDC's labor relations attorney, was invited to be a guest speaker at the AAAC's May meeting. He reminded the committee that its main focus was to promote an environment free of discrimination. To do so, the committee should stay focused on its own issues and not stray from the mission statement, he said. Other concerns should be directed to the appropriate resources available to employees.

The committee's plans include:

- Continuation of team building exercises
- Creation of a Zero Tolerance Statement
- Diversity Symposiums (for all employees) – A possible idea of the symposium format would be to provide employees the opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with management leaders.
- 2nd Diversity Study Circle (during the fall) The second phase of the Study Circles was approved by CEO M. Stephen Rhoades. The CEO supports the AAAC mission statement and its role at the District and firmly believes that all employees should be treated with dignity and respect.
- Rick Gomez, AAAC Chairman, will be conducting on-site visits to discuss the affirmative action plan.

The AAAC members thank all MDC employees who have taken the time to meet with them and voice their concerns. The committee's tasks would be difficult to perform without the MDC employees' continued support.

The AAAC's mission statement is available at <http://www.themdc.com> under the Office of Diversity.