

Public forum on violence prevention Thursday in Santa Rosa

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Tuesday, January 29, 2013 at 2:56 p.m.

Promoting nonviolence in local schools, courts and the community is the focus of a public forum Thursday night kicking off the local "Season for Nonviolence," sponsored by a group of nonprofit agencies.

County Supervisor Mike McGuire will moderate a panel of "local peacebuilders" at a forum entitled "Walking The Talk: Effective Solutions for Violence Prevention in Sonoma County" from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the East Dining Room of the Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building, 1351 Maple Ave.

Panelists will include Robert Ochs, the county's chief probation officer; Anna Guzman, a Santa Rosa city schools administrator; Susan Kinder, executive director of the nonprofit Restorative Resources, and Kate Jenkins, executive director of Friends Outside in Sonoma County.

Prior to the panel discussion, Stephanie Van Hook of the Metta Center for Nonviolence will present a one-hour workshop on nonviolence starting at 6 p.m.

Both events are free and open to the public, with refreshments and entertainment by Jim Corbett's Love Choir.

Season for Nonviolence, celebrated in more than 900 cities in all 50 states and 67 countries, is in its 16th year overall and third year in Sonoma County, organizers said.

It is a 64-day campaign that runs from Jan. 30 to April 4, the dates that commemorate the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

"We're trying to raise consciousness over community programs that combat violence," said Margaret Koren of Windsor, a retired nurse and member of Peace Alliance, one of the sponsoring groups.

"We cannot instigate world peace when we have no peace at home," she said.

Kendra Mon of Petaluma, a retired social service provider and another organizer, said that people often think of peace as "a state of being without violence."

In reality, she said, it takes "hard work" in schools and other community institutions to foster "peaceful resolution of conflict."

Restorative Justice is a good example of that effort, Koren said. The Santa Rosa-based nonprofit, recently awarded a \$900,000 federal grant, organizes support groups of young offenders who meet with the victims of their crimes to develop



concrete plans for making amends.

Friends Outside in Sonoma County, affiliated with a national organization, provides services to families affected by incarceration.

The Peace Alliance, also a national organization, advocates the establishment of a U.S. Department of Peace to bolster state and local peace-building efforts as well as nonviolent approaches to international conflict.

Co-sponsors of the Season for Nonviolence include the Metta Center, Peace & Justice Center of Sonoma County, Leadership Institute for Ecology & Economy, Peace Alliance, Restorative Resources, Alternatives to Violence Project and the Criminal Baking Co.

For more information and a schedule of events during the Season for Nonviolence -- including documentary movie screenings, Sufi dancing, an Emotional Aikido Clinic and a program on Restorative Justice -- go to www.mettacenter.org/season.

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