

REACH BEYOND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

'Hi' society

City residents meet up at neighborly event

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WALTHAM – The word of the day at Back Pages Books on Wednesday, Feb. 1, was “Hi.”

Not only were dozens of people repeating the greeting to each other at the Moody Street bookstore, but some

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were even handing it out on bright orange cards, the word “Hi” written in big black text.

The simple one-syllable salutation is at the heart of a new campaign organized by Waltham-based REACH Beyond Domestic Violence, or REACH for short, to encourage Waltham residents to talk to their neighbors and even strangers in order to build a safer community.

Allison Berry, community organizer for REACH, said the initiative is in response to a community-wide survey they conducted starting two years ago, asking residents if they believed domestic violence was an individual, family, or community issue.

Most, said Berry, responded “community.”

As a response, REACH devised the “Small Actions Campaign,” starting with saying hello to your neighbor.

“We really believe that knowing your neighbors in general can help create a

safer community,” said Berry. “When I know your name and know who you are, it helps me be more likely to look out for you.”

She said a tight-knit community can help curb issues as complex and difficult-to-reach as domestic violence.

“For people who are experiencing violence, it can really help decrease the isolation that many times they often feel from family and friends,” she said.

The beginning of the campaign is “Say Hi To Your Neighbor Week,” Feb. 5 to Feb. 12, and the kickoff event was held at Back Pages Books on Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

The goal of the week is for the participants to reach a combined 2,012 “hellos.” REACH will keep track on its website, reachma.org, where the participants can post when they greet someone new, where it happened, and any other information they want to add.

Once they submit it, an orange and black “Hi” icon will appear on a map of Waltham, in the location they selected.

However, saying “hi” is only the beginning of the process, said Berry.

The next step on the Small Action Campaign list is sharing a cup of coffee with a neighbor. Waltham restaurant In A Pickle will play a role in that step by giving

coupons to people so they can come in and share a coffee with someone.

The restaurant will also participate by offering their customers a chance to send a free cupcake to a neighbor by filling out a form on Monday, Feb. 4. The cupcakes will be delivered on Wednesday, Feb. 6.

“The goal of the campaign is to get more people involved in a variety of different ways in the community talking about prevention,” said Berry.

State Rep. Thomas Stanley was at the kickoff event, and encouraged Waltham residents to participate in the weeklong “Say Hi To Your Neighbor” event.

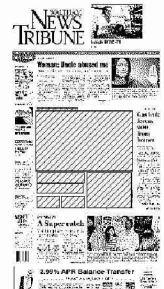
“It’s a good idea for people to say hi to their neighbors and for more people to get to know each other through the city,” he said. “By doing that, I think we’re all better protected.”

He said that in his neighborhood, people do communicate with each other and that Waltham residents tend to know their neighbors. Nonetheless, he knows there are many that simply fall through the cracks.

“We do have a lot of people that move into Waltham that are not from here originally and it takes a while for people to get to know each other,” he said. “But through time, new relationships are formed and the concept of tonight’s event is a great one to encourage people to start that process earlier.”

Belgica Garzon, a Waltham resident originally from Ecuador, said she has noticed that many Hispanic immigrants have trouble integrating into Waltham life, but she encourages all of them to get past their fears.

“I tell them to not be scared, to look for help and to express themselves,” said Gar-



zon, in Spanish. "I know that sometimes the language is difficult and we get nervous that we'll be looked down on or that we'll be marginalized. I don't speak perfect English, I get nervous, but the times I have participated, I've been the only Latina."

She said that even though she has trouble communicating, she doesn't let it stop her from getting involved locally.

"It's a challenge that I set for myself as something I know I can achieve," she said. "It helps me to know I can go forward."

Throughout the event on Wednesday, guests shared stories about getting to know their neighbors in the community.

Alex Green, who owns Back Pages Books, said he first found the location for his bookstore through something as simple as a "hello," from Annie Pitaro, a volunteer for REACH.

"The first person to say 'hi' and make me feel really welcome and give me this amazing sense of, 'this is why you want a bookstore in the community,' was Annie Pitaro," said Green, who was looking for a place to set up shop after graduating from Brandeis University. "Everyone in this room, I know you because Annie said 'hi.'"

Mayor Jeannette McCarthy, state Rep. John Lawn, and City Councilors Kenneth Doucette and Diane LeBlanc were also at the event.

Bob Marcou, who owns Marcou Jewelers and who has been involved in organizing the Small Actions Campaign, spoke at the event, and earli-

er in the day was out at the commuter rail station by Waltham Common saying "hello" to arriving commuters.

"We didn't sell them anything, we weren't politicking or anything and it was really a great experience," he said.

Jim Walker, the photo editor for the Waltham News Tribune, also got involved in REACH's campaign. He told a story of how he first got hooked by Reach's cause, at their annual Waltham Neighborhoods Fall Festival held outside the Waltham Public Library.

At that event, Walker remembered a woman standing in front of a map of Waltham, and asking every passerby to mark their favorite place in the city.

"It was a very positive question," said Walker, who then got involved with REACH and has helped market the Small Actions Campaign.

Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian also stopped

by and shared some words about the importance of getting to know your neighbors.

"The last time we probably felt close to our neighbors was the Blizzard of '78," said Koutoujian. "It's when we went out, we met them, we got to know everyone, and it was really a special time to get to know your neighbors."

He said that when he moved into his current home eight years ago, he remembers a neighbor bringing him food.

"This is a really important campaign," he said. "Just saying hello, just getting to know someone, you never know... when someone might be suffering."

For a list of events going on during "Say Hi To Your Neighbor Week," or to enter in your own "Hi" moment, visit reachma.org.

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City Councilor Tom Stanley, left, and Marcou Jewelers owner Bob Marcou talk at the Say Hi to Your Neighbor Week kickoff at Back Pages Books. PHOTO BY MARK THOMSON



Waltham residents Stewart Woodward and Maureen King chat at Back Pages Books during a kickoff event for REACH Beyond Domestic Violence's Small Actions Campaign to begin Waltham's official "Say Hi to Your Neighbor" Week on Wednesday. PHOTO BY MARK THOMSON



Waltham residents gathered at Back Pages Books during Wednesday's kickoff event for Reach Beyond Domestic Violence's Small Actions Campaign to begin Waltham's Say Hi to Your Neighbor Week. PHOTO BY MARK THOMSON