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Local organization seeks to bring National attention to Rochester

Organizers of Legacy of '64 event believe Rochester story is a model for the nation

(Rochester, NY) - Dr. Melody Cofield, the chairperson of Legacy of '64, is on a mission.

She wants to tell the story of Rochester, NY to the world.

Rochester is best known as the birthplace of both Xerox and Kodak.

But Dr. Cofield says there's much more to this city's story. She wants to focus specifically on the year of '64, and what she calls the ray of hope that transformed an entire community.

Cofield and her organization are spearheading the *Legacy of '64* campaign to bring awareness to what she's termed the "post-riot collaborations" that took place to heal the city. The event, *Ripple Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony*, will take place on July 30 at the Oak Hill Country Club.

This story of hope, like so many others, begins in tragedy. Enter the Rochester riots of 1964. The riot, which resulted from a misunderstanding between police and African American residents, devastated the city.

Despite being considered the catalyst for what's known as the "Long Hot Summer" of civil unrest that gripped major cities throughout the country, the events of this Rochester story have largely been relegated to a footnote in history.

"We haven't been tracking and chronicling the history and legacy of the post-riot collaborations," Dr. Cofield says. "We didn't record it 50 years ago. Now the merits of its outcomes are largely unknown and lost. If you don't know and don't track your history, then history will repeat itself."

And there have been repeats. Between 2015 and 2016, multiple cases of civil unrest have broken out across the country in response to issues that range from police brutality to inflamed protests aimed at current presidential contender Donald Trump, who has been accused of inciting violence with his divisive politics.

Divisiveness is what has inspired Melody Cofield.

She and her organization have claimed the mantle of healing the divide.

"We're all broken," she says. "That's why we're aiming to heal. We want to repair people's broken wings."

Cofield believes the story of Rochester shouldn't be forgotten, but not because of the riot. She's focused on what happened after the riot.

"It was in the spirit of humanity, that many people came together after the 1964 riots to build a sustainable society founded on respect, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace for all," she says.

How did this translate into tangible solutions?

"After the riot essentially made a portion of the city uninhabitable, Rochester community leaders came together for a solution," says Cofield. "This solution required everyone, no matter their race or religion, to work together. This led to the formation of F.I.G.H.T."

F.I.G.H.T. (the acronym stands for Freedom, Independence, God, Honor, Today) was the organization tasked with bringing jobs to the Rochester community.

"Many courageous individuals awakened to the plight and conditions of others and were called into action," Cofield says. "Many improvements were made after the riot that produced positive outcomes such as more housing and jobs."

Corporate leaders signed on to help. F.I.G.H.T. join forces with Xerox. At a time when it was unpopular to do so, Xerox CEO, Joseph Wilson (who Cofield plans to posthumously honor at the Legacy '64 event along with 9 other inductees), unapologetically declared his mission to provide jobs for low-income blacks.

This pairing gave birth to FIGHTON, which later became Eltrex Industries. Eltrex Industries was responsible for the employment of thousands of African American residents.

"FIGHTON marked a political breakthrough: nationally, it was one of the first Community Development Corporations (CDC) of that turbulent era, with a mission to train and provide employment opportunities to the hard-core unemployed in Rochester. It would become a model for CDSs across the United States," Cofield explains.

Dr. Cofield believes that the reason this success story isn't a part of the national narrative is because the Rochester community itself has forgotten its history.

This is largely evident in recent statistics from the city. Where Rochester once rebuilt itself into a booming sector of economic activity, the city has taken critical financial blows since the 1990s.

The crushing point came when a study announced that Rochester is the fifth poorest city in the country.

How can a city with so many issues of its own be looked to as an example?

Dr. Cofield explains, "Rochester lost its way. We didn't continue on the path we established right after the riot. This city did some amazing things, and we have to get back to that point."

Her plan is to revitalize the city by telling the 1964 story of community, collaboration and hope.

"First, Rochester has to itself remember its history," Cofield says. "We have to embrace that history and restore it; and then we can take that history to the nation."

Her hope is that the Legacy of '64 event will prove therapeutic for Rochester residents, reminding them of the turbulent events of the past, but also focusing on the vision that restored the city's humanity.

Legacy '64 will honor ten community leaders that stepped forward and shouldered the burden of rebuilding Rochester.

"We want to examine the 'ripple effect' of these individuals," Cofield says. "We want to focus on how their contributions affected lives. The ripple effect is invisible, but I believe it's more powerful than anything that we can ever imagine."

She has enlisted the help of Rochester residents, but she's embraced other communities worldwide. The most recent addition to the Legacy of '64 campaign is acclaimed artist TAFE, who himself is a Ghanaian native turned Harlem resident. His painting will be auctioned at the event.

TAFE's clientele boasts the husband of one current presidential nominee.

Former President Bill Clinton is displayed prominently on the Harlem artists' website in photos that show the two men talking, shaking hands and laughing together. One of TAFE's collections is displayed at the Clinton Foundation.

When asked if she will attempt to leverage TAFE's connection with Bill Clinton to try to get the former president's support for the Legacy of '64 movement, Cofield doesn't shy away.

"We want President Bill Clinton and Oprah," Cofield laughs. "We want to get the nation's attention with our message of threading people together."

Solemnly, and perhaps with a hint of foreboding, she adds, "We just want to prevent future riots."

About the Upcoming Event

The first annual Ripple Hall of Fame 2016 Inaugural Induction Ceremony
Celebrating the Spirit of Humanity

Date: July 30, 2016
Location: Oak Hill Country Club” 145 Kilbourn Road, Rochester, NY
Time: 6:00 PM Until
Tickets: Available online at: www.legacy64.org

This legacy award is the first of its kind to honor those whose collaborative efforts have left positive lasting marks on the history of Rochester following the riots of 1964. The inauguration ceremony will be held at the Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, NY. Inductees were selected based on criteria guided by the *Legacy of '64 Spirit of Uplifting Humanity Vision*: to sustain a global society founded on respect, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

Each year the Ripple Hall of Fame induction ceremony will select from 17 legacy collaboration categories that emerged from the research of Dr. Cofield, including: Faith Based, Housing, Health and Wellness, and more.

This year the award category “Employment” is captured in the theme: “We need Jobs.”

The ten (10) individuals were nominated and selected by a committee for the 2016 inaugural induction into the Ripple Hall of Fame. They include:

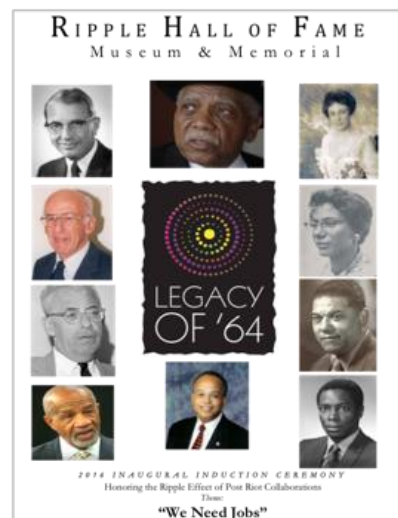
2016 “We Need Jobs” Inductees:

Living Legacy

Rev. Franklin Florence
Dr. Matthew Augustine, Matthew Dr. Walter Cooper
Constance Mitchell
Rev. Raymond Scott

Legendary (Posthumously):

Jospeh C. Wilson
Mrs. Harper Sibley (Georgiana Farr Sibley)
Saul David Alinsky
Horace Becker
John Mitchell



Event Activities

“This year, the event will introduce the first annual *Ripple Art Window of Humanity* symposium,” says Dr. Cofield.

“Art is the window of humanity---the reflective lens by which we see each other. By collaborating with artists we can help to create a local and national momentum for the movement.”

“We will be featuring a distinguished collection of art pieces accompanied with stories that project the goodness of human nature and captures the most precious of human values and experiences. The art and stories will help us generate community dialogue.”

About Legacy of '64

Founded in 2013, *Legacy of '64* is a movement organization designed to awaken and uplift the spirit of humanity across the nation, starting with Rochester, NY. It is poised to become a historic legacy preservation institution dedicated to preserving the history and legacies of post-riot collaborations, honoring its outstanding contributors, and connecting past, present, and future generations. It has developed a portfolio of H.E.A.L. (Healing, Education, Awareness, Legacy) programs to inspire hope, healing, and a vision for restoring broken communities.

The inception of *Legacy of '64* was based on the findings of an oral history research project conducted by Dr. Melody Cofield. The research revealed seventeen (17) positive outcomes areas from collaborations that followed the Rochester rebellions of 1964.

The organization is currently located at 301 Exchange Boulevard, Suite 2-LL.

Contact:

Photos available upon request.

To learn more about Legacy of '64 and the upcoming event, please contact:

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