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Hands Join In Newburgh To Protest Klan Picnic

By Robert Hanley

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Religious and civic leaders and several thousand residents demonstrated in the heart of this old riverfront city today to protest a gathering of neo-Nazis and members and sympathizers of the Ku Klux Klan three weeks ago in the

neighboring Town of Newburgh.

The theme was racial and religious unity against demagoguery.

"Hate and racism won't survive -- can't survive in a community that has finally come alive," the city's Mayor, Audrey Carey, a black woman, told a crowd the police estimated at 3,000 after a milelong march up Broadway. "Let us make a definitive and strong statement to those hate mongers -- they will not, will not, will not be tolerated in this community."

Harold Ramsey, the head of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and a former Mayor, Joan Shapiro, who organized today's protest with Rabbi Hirshel Jaffe of Temple Beth Jacob, both said the Klan was recruiting in the Newburgh area. 'A Higher Plane'

"There is no window of opportunity in this community for hate groups," Mr. Ramsey said. "The next time they come, we're going to stand up, speak out and show solidarity. Let's take this community to a higher plane."

Mrs. Shapiro and Rabbi Jaffe said they and the city's clergy and civil rights leaders wanted to mount a show of multiracial, multireligious unity as Newburgh's answer to a picnic held on Sept. 12 for William Hoff, who says he is the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in New York. Frank Birdsall, the owner of a fence company in the Town of Newburgh, said today that he sponsored the event at his home as a "unity" rally for the 57-year-old Mr. Hoff, who, he said, is a write-in candidate for the United States Senate from New York.

The picnic, Mr. Birdsall said, drew about 100 members of the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups from several states, including New Jersey, Maine, Connecticut, New York and Delaware. The groups, he said, came to his home with swastikas and with American, German and Confederate flags and signs saying "Welcome Aryans." 'A Free Thinker'

Mr. Birdsall said he was not a member of any of the groups but held the picnic because of the friendship he and Mr. Hoff developed in New York City in the early 1960's.

"I belong to nothing," Mr. Birdsall said by phone. "I'm just what they call a free thinker."

During today's demonstration, some marchers expressed concern that the Ku Klux Klan may be attempting to exploit racial differences among Newburgh's 26,000 residents.

"I feel we have been indifferent to each other's needs," said one resident, Lydia Parmeter, who is 48 years old. "Insensitivity breeds racism, and if they see a loophole, they'll jump right through it." A Chant Against Bigotry

Before today's speeches started, two clergymen, the Rev. Carlos Lantis, who is white and is pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church, and the Rev. Saul Williams, who is black and leads the Baptist Temple, led a chant against racial divisiveness and bigotry.

After it subsided, Rabbi Jaffe said, "How good it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity."

New York's State Attorney General, Robert Abrams, the Democratic challenger to Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato, the Republican incumbent, attended the rally and decried racial hatred and prejudice. "Let the feeling of brotherhood and unity imbued in us today be with us forever," Mr. Abrams said.

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