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Do you have a conflict with someone? Seek CRC's help

By Manotti L. Jenkins
AFRO Staff Writer

Hey buddy, hey lady, got a beef with your girlfriend, boyfriend, uncle, aunt, or that neighbor who is always giving you the business?

If you find yourself involved in a conflict with somebody, the city's Community Relations Commission (CRC) implores you to think before taking drastic action.

A program initiated by CRC several years ago could become a more effective resource for preventing some civil disputes from reaching the level of police and court actions if more people were informed of it, according to Tom Saunders, community division supervisor for the Eutaw Street-based agency.

CRC's Mediation Program, established during the 1970's, is an informal dispute settlement process the agency uses to facilitate resolutions between parties involved in a conflict.

"What we try to convey to people is that if they allow the dispute to continue, it may result in violence where the police have to become involved or it may go to court where it can become very costly," said Saunders.

He explained that the process usually begins with a person calling the agency with a complaint with another person, family or group.

But Saunders added that on some occasions, the agency receives referrals from the Baltimore Police Department, the courts, or juvenile services.

In the event of this, an agency representative will follow-up on the referral by contacting the complainant.

The representative receives basic information from the complainant in terms of identification, a statement of the incident, and does a brief evaluation of the dispute, which is recorded on an Initial Contact Form.

After analyzing the complaint to see "whether it needs immediate attention or is a regular case," the representative gives the case to the division chief, Lillian Jones, who assigns the case to a representative for further action, said Saunders.

He explained that an example of a "regular case" is a dispute between neighbors over the volume of music or other noise level - related incidents.

The representative then contacts both sides of the dispute to get both sides and tries to find "commonalities" in their arguments, continued Saunders.

He acknowledged that the emphasis is then placed on getting both parties to participate in a grievance session with the representative, which he said is usually not difficult to do.

"Generally, most people agree to participate because I think that generally most people want to live in peace," commented the supervisor.

During the session, the representative finds out what complaints are most important to the initial complainant, then generates dialogue between the disputing parties so they can reach some resolutions themselves.

Finally, according to Saunders, a written agreement is signed by both parties once the resolution is reached.

Acknowledging that a copy of the agreement is given to the parties to keep, Saunders said, "There's no legal binding (to the agreement), but people feel good with a written agreement that they can refer to in case someone gets out of line."

He said the public seems to be gaining more exposure to the program because there was an increase in the number of cases heard by the agency in 1986.

Sighting the number of cases heard this year to be 166, the supervisor did not give the number from 1985.

Saunders emphasized that the program is very important because there have been minor incidents recently that were allowed to reach a crisis level.

He recalled a case a few years ago in which a northeast Baltimore youth was shot by a man who said he was tired of the youth throwing snowballs at his house.

Saunders said the program representatives are required to attend seminars on mediation training that are conducted by CRC's Mediation Specialist, Alvin Gillard.

Romare Bearden Exhibit

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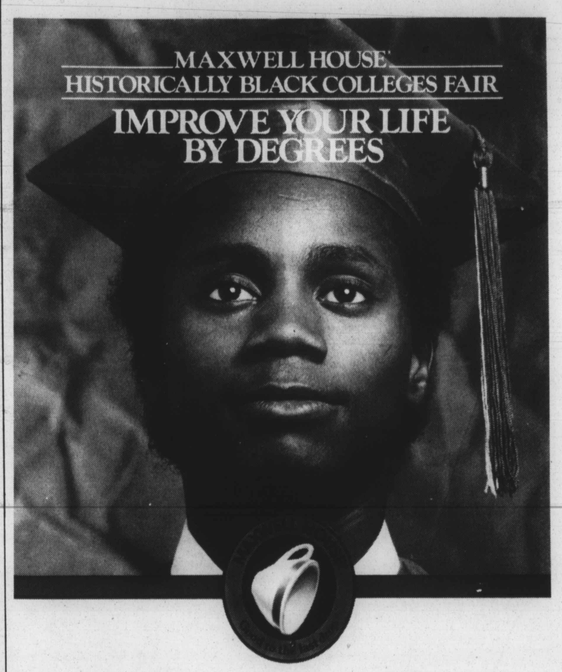

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