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2nd annual hate crime conference brings together law enforcement, educators and community

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Ryan Honeycutt is half white, half El Salvadoran. One night a year ago last May, while he was at a friend's house, he was lured outside by two white males who had also been at the party. They hit him from behind, called him "a dirty Mexican" then proceeded to beat him profusely, breaking his clavicle. For 6 months afterwards, Ryan couldn't move nor eat properly (he was unable to use his left hand). He also had to give up his job in construction.

"I was racially beaten," Ryan said, as he recounted his experience during Orange County's 2nd annual conference on hate crime held last Friday, October 9 at Coastline Community College in Garden Grove.

Over 120 law enforcement, educators and community organizers learned about the importance of hate crime legislation and the tensions between hate-related activities, speech and first amendment rights.

The conference, subtitled "Hate Crime: A Community Response", focused on the issue of underreporting and the need to create a community where residents are aware and comfortable in reporting hate related activities.



Ryan Honeycutt (left) with Judy Iannaccone, president of OC Human Relations Board of Directors, and Rusty Kennedy, executive director of OC Human Relations.

Why should law enforcement respond to hate crimes? Lt. Josef Levy of the Long Beach Police Department, who taught the session, "Anatomy of a Hate Crime," argued that hate crimes result in: community wide unrest, divisiveness, retaliation, terrified victims and crimes that are increasingly brutal and injurious. He also urged law enforcement responding to possible hate crime related incidents to be "professional, objective, and patient."

Heather Williams, program director of Community Service Programs, Inc., said that hate crimes can be prevented through education, enforcement and community involvement.

Although reported hate crimes in Orange County have remained relatively stable for the past few years, a 2005 US Bureau of Justice study found that hate crimes were substantially underreported nation-wide. In 2008, there were 79 reported hate crimes in Orange County, down from 79 in 2007. African Americans, which make up only 2 percent of the county's population, remained as the most frequently targeted group.

"We organized this conference out of a desire to educate more people about this critical issue and to encourage interested parties to work more closely together to solve the root cause of this societal issue," said Rusty Kennedy, executive director of OC Human Relations Commission.

The event was hosted by OC Human Relations in collaboration with the Orange County Hate Crime Victim Assistance Partnership. It was endorsed by the Orange County Chief's and Sheriff's Association.

Other speakers included Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean of UCI's School of Law, Chief Paul Sorrell, President of the Orange County Chiefs' and Sheriff's Association, and David Bishop, Director of the University of California, GLBT Resource Center.

The conference provided attendees with five workshops, some of which were geared to law enforcement and educators.

- Hate Crime: 1st Response Through Prosecution** – a 2.5 hour POST-certified training for Law Enforcement;
- Hate Crime 101** – presented by Lt. Josef Levy, Long Beach Police Department;
- Underreporting: A Community Issue**– a panel discussion with representatives from a number of ethnic and religious communities;
- Bullying in Schools: Harassment Puts Gay Youth at Risk** - a presentation on the impact of bullying and how school's can counter it;
- A Protocol for Responding to Hate Crimes and Incidents on Campus-** a panel discussion/presentation

For more information, go to www.ochumanrelations.org.

About OC Human Relations

Since 1971, OC Human Relations has worked to build bridges of understanding to promote a vision of our community where all people are valued and included and our diversity is realized as a source of strength. The agency has published an annual hate crime report for the past 17 years. For more information, visit www.ochumanrelations.org.

About the OC Hate Crime Victim Assistance Partnership

The OC Hate Crime Victim Assistance Partnership is a partnership of almost 20 community and law enforcement agencies that works to prevent hate crime through education, enforcement and community awareness, while providing services to victims of hate crimes. For more information, visit www.ochatecrimevap.org