Working Toward Better Race Relations

By William Zakee McGill

Most readers of this paper have heard of the NAACP - the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Many are probably not aware that it has always been an interracial organization. It was founded in 1909 by W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells and other prominent African Americans, in partnership with an even larger number of whites, who wanted to advance equality for minority citizens and eliminate race prejudice.

The NAACP was organized after a white race riot at the height of "Jim Crow" -- that nightmarish era of American history which began not long after the Civil War when hateful laws and practices nullified the full citizenship won for African Americans. Mandatory segregation, exclusion from voting, the horror of widespread lynching — all these things were keeping Blacks from gaining ground politically, economically, socially, and educationally. More than a century later, our struggle continues against multiple layers of racism, as seen daily in videos and hateful posts on social media.

The Berkeley County chapter of the NAACP is active on several fronts. We are working with the police and other government agencies to address systemic bias. Our members recently restored the badly deteriorated African American cemetery on Burke Street. We have a committee to address the needs of veterans. We are part of the Equal Justice Initiative lynching-memorial project. We are sponsoring an essay contest ($500 prize) for local high school students to investigate the history of racism in WV. We are organizing youth chapters and running a Black Kids Matter campaign. And our Legal Redress Committee provides emotional support and legal referrals to persons suffering racial discrimination.

Our monthly meetings are multi-racial, friendly and efficient. We heartily welcome new members - persons of any race or religion who wish to contribute to the betterment of race relations in our community. Contact us at naacp.berkeley.county@gmail.com or find us on Facebook at NAACP Martinsburg, Berkeley County, WV.

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