

News Release



Embargoed for Release

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**BCBSF AND NCCJ SPONSOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST
ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

JACKSONVILLE -- An innovative approach to helping communities resolve conflict was the subject of a community leadership breakfast sponsored today by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF) and the Jacksonville Office of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ).

This peaceful approach to resolving ethnic, religious and racial conflicts, called "The Listening Project," was developed by conflict resolution expert Herb Walters, keynote speaker for the event. Walters' approach has been used successfully in Louisiana, Serbia and Croatia.

"BCBSF and NCCJ are working to help our community leaders understand cultural diversity," said BCBSF Regional Vice President Ernest N. Brodsky. "The goal of the breakfast is to encourage all residents of Jacksonville to see themselves as members of one community."

Walters, who is the founder of the Rural Southern Voice for Peace, has been active in the field of peaceful conflict resolution for the past 20 years. In 1986, he developed "The Listening Project."

"The Listening Project" begins with the development of an open-ended set of questions about a conflict. Two-person teams then use the questions to determine the views and solutions developed by community leaders in response to the conflict. The final step encourages community groups to set goals and use the survey results to develop new skills and strategies for resolving the conflict.

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FACT SHEET

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BCBSF SPONSORS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP BREAKFASTS

MISSION

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF) and the Jacksonville Office of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) are working to help our community leaders understand cultural diversity. The goal of the breakfasts is to encourage all residents of Jacksonville to see themselves as members of one community.

RECAP OF PAST LEADERSHIP BREAKFASTS

The first seminar featured the three winners of NCCJ's annual "Brotherhood-Sisterhood Oratorical Scholarship Contest." The student speakers expressed their views on family violence, respect and tolerance among races and cultures, and the racial harmony sought by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The theme of the second business seminar, "Learning to Live Together," focused on diversity in the workplace. Dr. Robert Anthony, who is an associate professor of special education at the University of North Florida and director of the Deaf Service Center of Jacksonville, was the keynote speaker.

"Religious Diversity in the Workplace and Community" was the topic of the third seminar. The event brought together -- for the first time in Jacksonville -- leaders of the Baha'i, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faiths.

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BIOGRAPHY

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HERB WALTERS

Herb Walters has been active in the field of non-violent conflict resolution for 20 years. In 1986, he founded "The Listening Project," an innovative, peaceful approach to solving ethnic, religious and racial conflicts.

Over the past eight years, Walters has traveled to Louisiana and throughout the United States to provide conflict resolution training to grassroots citizen groups working on civil rights, community development and environmental issues. Most recently, he has worked on projects in Serbia and Croatia. He has also used "The Listening Project" in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Palau, the former Soviet Union and Libya.

The following are examples of how "The Listening Project" has succeeded in resolving conflicts:

- o In St. Mary's, Georgia, activists demonstrating against nuclear weapons at a submarine base were viewed as "outside agitators" by local residents. "The Listening Project" helped activists and community residents build common ground and friendship.
- o In the Serbian community of Bretovac, Yugoslavia ethnic resentment and violence was directed toward a Muslim minority. A listening project with community leaders, local residents and those involved in violence was able to clear-up misinformation, increase understanding and give voice to ideas for peace between Serbs and Muslims.

In 1981, Walters founded the Rural Southern Voice for Peace, a North Carolina-based organization that works with religious, civic and citizen organizations to influence positive social change in their communities.

Walters lives with his wife and children in North Carolina. He has a master's degree in social ecology from Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont.