

RPECnews

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

September-October 2013



RPEC Youth Program Alumnus Looks Back To a Formative Time

By Jorrell Watkins

As I type my weekly report for my summer internship, I think about what made me want to return to Richmond and continue my work with RPEC.

The Richmond Youth Peace Project (RYPP) gave me a method and guidance in my goals of serving my community. I joined RYPP my junior year in High School. I was already familiar with it thanks to my teacher Ram Bhagat and because I met RYPP trainers while performing at the Educoncert. I was curious to find out more about what RYPP had to offer.

As a student at Open High School in 2009-11, Jorrell Watkins was an RYPP leader for many programs and activities. Now attending Hampshire College in Massachusetts, he served last summer as an RPEC intern.

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Much Familiar, More New To Enjoy At RPEC's Annual Auction Nov. 9

The 2013 RPEC Auction will be held Saturday, November 9 -- little more than a month from now. It promises to be combination of the comfortable and familiar with things that are new and exciting.

The most important change is a shift to a new venue: the Crowne Plaza Hotel, located downtown at 555 East Canal Street. We can accommodate more guests comfortably and enjoy good space in which to visit with friends and browse through auction items.

The evening, which begins at 5:30 PM, features a silent auction, a cocktail hour, music, and a buffet dinner enjoyed at tables that seat eight persons, all followed by the live auction at which you can bid for your favorites.

Tickets for the Auction are \$40, which includes cocktails and dinner. We have space for about 225 persons, so *please be sure to get your tickets early*. Last year, the Auction was sold out almost two weeks before the event.

Order your tickets now!

You can purchase your tickets easily with a credit card online at www.rpec.org/2013-dinner-auction or by calling the office at (804) 232-1002. Or you can mail a check to RPEC, noting that your check is for auction tickets.



A new item for bidding

Not City Hall, but Michael Paul Williams, one of five interesting Richmonders who will share time for discussion of current issues with winning bidders.

There is a new option this year that is special and might appeal to you. Individuals, businesses, or not-for-profits can become sponsors of the RPEC Auction. Sponsors will be recognized on the Auction website and in the printed program, as well as on the Powerpoint displays that will be part of the evening.

Marii Hasegawa Sponsorships offer two tickets, acknowledgement on the webpage and in the program and the RPEC newsletter, for \$300.

Ella Baker Sponsorships offer four tickets, your logo on the webpage and in the program and the video presentation, plus verbal acknowledgement of your generosity, for \$600.

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Reflection

Adria Scharf
Director, Richmond Peace Education Center

The Rapidly Evolving Situation in Syria

A few short weeks ago, air strikes on Syria seemed imminent. News headlines on the last Tuesday in August warned, "Military strikes on Syria as early as Thursday." According to official sources, the U.S. was preparing a three day long missile bombardment.

As we approached the twelfth anniversary of 9/11 in early September, we seemed poised on the precipice of another war. It's been remarkable to watch the situation transform.

On the evening of September 10, President Obama made a public address in which, after he defended his right to pursue force, he said that he would change course and ask the leaders of Congress to postpone their vote to authorize the use of force in order to allow time to pursue a diplomatic plan to put Syria's chemical weapons under international control. Secretary of State John Kerry went to Geneva to meet with his Russian counterpart and a plan to secure and destroy chemical weapons in Syria has resulted. Next week, international chemical weapons inspectors will begin inspecting Syria's stockpile of weapons under the terms of the deal struck in September.

There is a long and uncertain diplomatic road ahead and U.S. military strikes remain very much on the table. But we have for the moment left the path leading directly to military engagement in favor of the path of international diplomacy. That is something to celebrate.

The Public Speaks

Public pressure was key to this remarkable foreign policy turnaround. The U.S. voting public overwhelmingly opposed military strikes, and elected leaders from both parties agreed. It was the threat of a congressional vote against military authorization that encouraged the administration to take seriously the "Putin plan" on chemical weapons, and abandon strikes. It didn't hurt, too, that much of the international community, from the Pope (who called for a global day of prayer and fasting for peace) to the British Parliament (which voted against British involvement in strikes), to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (who urged a diplomatic solution) opposed U.S. strikes, leaving the Obama administration wholly isolated internationally in its calls for military intervention.

All in all, this change in course suggests that we have in fact learned something from the last 12 years of foreign policy fiascos. It also suggests that the American public and its representatives in Congress may have entered a new phase of U.S. thoughtfulness and skepticism about wars of choice.

The fact remains that a terrible Syrian civil war continues. The Syrian government has committed crimes described by Human Rights Watch as

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Reflections on Syria

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“egregious,” including “deliberate and indiscriminate killings of tens of thousands of civilians, executions, torture, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests.” The rebel forces have also committed horrific massacres and indiscriminate killings. Millions of Syrians have been displaced and more than one hundred thousand have been killed.

Paradoxes

Paradoxically, while they’re engaging in diplomacy over chemical weapons, the United States and Russia are both actively fueling the bloody Syrian civil war. The CIA is providing lethal aid to the opposition while Russia is providing a variety of forms of support to the Assad government.

Many around the world see our humanitarian concern about chemical weapons in Syria itself as a paradox. Many have difficulty taking seriously U.S. concerns, remembering how we supported Iraq in the 1980s when it used chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers, and given that U.S. ally Israel used white phosphorus in densely populated areas of Gaza during the Gaza war. Our own covert activities and our own uneven record on standing up to chemical weapons weaken our credibility at times like this.

Pathways and Pitfalls

Still, in my view, this new diplomatic effort in Syria, with all of its paradoxes, does at least potentially represent a different way, and present some possible pathways to peace.

Both sides of the Syrian civil war are so dependent on outside sources of funds and arms, that hypothetically, and with continued public pressure, U.S.-Russian collaboration on addressing Syrian chemical weapons could lead to an arms embargo and ceasefire...or at minimum to a “lowering of the temperature” of the conflict. More ambitiously, with some creative leadership, it could lead to a Peace Conference including both sides of the Syrian conflict and other stakeholders, a solution that has been urged by United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi. “There is no military solution to this conflict,” says Brahimi. This conflict will require a political solution involving all parties.

The path ahead remains full of pitfalls. Here and abroad, there are many forces still pressing for a war on Syria, and the possibility of strikes remains. For these reasons, it is important for voters to stay engaged.

We encourage RPEC members to contact your Senators and Representatives. Tell your representatives that, while you want Syria, and all countries, to abolish weapons of mass destruction, you definitely do not want war. Tell them that you support a ceasefire, an end to lethal aid to the Syrian opposition, and a peace conference involving all stakeholders. Longer term, we also need to strengthen international institutions like the Hague Criminal Court and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (<http://www.opcw.org/>). With stronger non-military enforcement options in place, we might stop turning to war as the only and best solution to global challenges.

RPEC leads lobbying Of Kaine, Warner

One outcome from RPEC’s March 19 forum, “The Cost of War: Dismantling the Military Industrial Complex and Building a Peace Economy,” was an ad-hoc RPEC committee focused on lobbying the Virginia Senators, Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, regarding sequestration.

In collaboration with the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), the committee drafted a letter of concern “about budget trends (with) projected cuts that would hurt disproportionately the poor and vulnerable in our society,” but not cut the military budget proportionately.

RPEC gathered signatures from individuals by posting the letter on its web site; while committee members gathered signatures from 30 faith and community leaders in Virginia. The letter and list of signers were sent to the Senators and to the media through a news release.

On August 7, Sen. Warner’s top aide on budget issues, Elizabeth Falcone, met with committee members and representatives from the signers to address, with personal stories and experience, their key concerns regarding effects of sequestration on our most vulnerable. On August 26, this same group met with Sen. Kaine.

The four key points were: 1. Protect human needs and social safety net programs from cuts; 2. Raise revenues without harming low-income earners or the progressivity of the tax code; 3. Find smart Pentagon savings of at least \$1 trillion over ten years; 4. Reinvest in programs to assist communities in transition and to build new economic opportunities (especially in communities affected by military budget cuts).

Both Sen. Warner’s aide and Sen. Kaine encouraged us to let them know how we think about the issues.

— Kathleen Kenney

Annual Auction

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Nelson Mandela Sponsorships offer eight tickets with priority seating, an advertisement in the Auction program and other recognition at the Auction. A special email thanking you will be sent to the entire RPEC mailing list, for \$1000.

Auction items are coming in quickly to the RPEC office. There are more than a half dozen vacation homes up for bid, and a good number of gourmet treats (a dinner with fine wines, monthly deliveries of soups and other delectables, ethnic specialty dinners, fine baked items, and more). There are services including home improvement (painting and carpentry, for example), unusual books, and attractive items for your homes.

And there are rare items such as a glass pitcher made in the Palestinian city of Nablus, and a beautiful necklace hand-made by a young Israeli artist whose work is attracting attention in Europe and the Middle East.

A monk's burgundy blanket, prayer beads, and other memorabilia of the Dalai Lama, brought directly from Dharmasala, India, will go to some lucky bidder.

Then there are opportunities to spend some time with persons who are helping to shape modern Richmond or to explain what is happening in the complex social and political world in which we live.

Claire Gastanaga is Director of the Virginia affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Claire will meet with a single bidder or couple to discuss how the ACLU plans to challenge recent Supreme Court decisions on voters' rights and gay marriage.

Michael Paul Williams, award-winning columnist for the Richmond Times Dispatch, will meet with a



Conversations on hot topics up for bid

Among the unique items for bidders will be conversations with interesting Richmonders: Beth O'Leary, Judy Hart and Claire Gastanaga (above, left to right), and Michael Paul Williams (pictured on Page 1).

single bidder or couple to discuss whatever items are most interesting in weeks after the Auction. Remember, Election Day is Nov. 5!

Judy Hart, former National Park Superintendent of the Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, N.Y., and of the Rosie the Riveter WWII/Home Front National Park in Richmond, Cal., (on San Francisco Bay) will tell how these important places of memory came into being, against opposition.

Beth O'Leary, recently retired as a curator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, will give up to six of us a personalized tour of the VMFA.

And Beth Marshak will take you on a tour of important -- and often overlooked -- gay and lesbian history sites in Richmond.

All of these special conversations can be over coffee or wine, or even a light meal. You will mutually arrange the place, date, and time for your meeting.

Thanks to Sponsors!

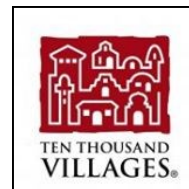
RPEC sincerely thanks the generous sponsors of this year's Dinner & Auction!

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To Johnnie. . . *'Thanks, and Peace'*

RPEC thanks Johnnie Taylor for her 12 years as the peace center's longest-serving staff person before she retired on August 30. Visitors to the office have been greeted during those years by her warm positive spirit.

As office manager, she handled countless office tasks and did all the background work necessary for the smooth running of the Center. She also led conflict resolution trainings with youth and adult populations, mentored several teen conflict resolution trainers, and was active in programs including our Racial Justice Initiative. She supervised office volunteers and also occasionally spoke to community groups as an RPEC representative. Johnnie Taylor will always remain an important member of the RPEC community. We wish her a wonderful and relaxing, well deserved retirement!

RYPP Website To Be Online at www.rypp.org

The Richmond Youth Peace Project (RYPP) has expanded its electronic presence with its own website—www.rypp.org. We hope this new site will offer teens another venue to express their views and to display their writing and visual arts.

The website was created through the efforts of RYPP trainers Priya

Workshops Offered for Adults and Teens

**HROC Basic for Adults,
Over 3 Days, Oct. 25-27**

The Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) program will offer a 3-day Basic workshop for adults beginning Friday, Oct. 25 from 6-9 p.m., continuing Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 26-27, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.

The training will take place at the Fan Free Clinic, 1010 North Thompson St., Richmond.

The HROC basic workshop explores violence, trauma, and its consequences, healing from trauma, loss, grief, anger and trust. Rather than using lectures, HROC facilitators invite participants to discover their own existing knowledge and wisdom for how to heal and how to help others. This approach, developed in East Africa, builds a community among members of the group.

To become a HROC facilitator, four levels of training are required, with the Basic session being the first. The fee for this session is \$150.

Please mail your check in advance to RPEC, 3500 Patterson Ave., Richmond VA 23221, with HROC Basic in the memo line.

To register, or for more information, email name, address and phone number to rpec@rpec.org.

**Basic HIP, Nov. 22-24,
For Youths and Adults**

RPEC's certified HIP (Help Increase the Peace) trainers Ram Bhagat and Santa Sorenson are offering a 3-day Basic HIP Workshop beginning on Friday, Nov. 22 from 6-9 p.m., continuing Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 23-24 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. This workshop is open to both adults, and the Peace Center's RYPP (Richmond Youth Peace Project) youths aged 15 and up.

HIP is a project of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) that teaches youths and adults non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and social change.

The fee is \$150 for adults and free to RYPP Youth. Email name, address and phone number to rpec@rpec.org to pre-register, or for more information. Please mail your check in advance to RPEC, 3500 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, VA 23221 with HIP Basic in the memo line.

Payroll Campaign Time

If you work for the state, local or federal government, or for an employer that participates in United Way, you can help RPEC by naming the Center for your tax-deductible payroll donation through the CVC, LG&S and United Way campaigns.

RPEC Campaign Codes:

Local Government and Schools
(LG&S): **#140**

United Way: **#3181**

Commonwealth of Virginia
Campaign (CVC): **#3751**

Please write both the code and "Richmond Peace Education Center."

RPEC Alumnus

Continued from Page 1

I recall walking through the double-doors at the church off of Forest Hill Ave, half-nervous and half excited to start my conflict resolution training. As I descended to the basement my anticipation skyrocketed. Through the small window, I saw a circle of chairs; I did not know it then but there is great power and unity in the circles RYPP trainers form during workshops. I opened the door, settle in and I'm greeted with illuminating smiles from Santa Sorenson and Paul Fleisher. I find a seat nearby them. "How can someone be so energetic at 9'o clock in the morning?" Soon enough the chairs fill with drowsy-eyed youth. I see one of my friends from school, and my nervousness slips away as I begin a conversation.

Once everyone settles in Santa and Paul greet everyone and we each introduce ourselves. Then we are shown the day's agenda. Ground rules, "light & livelies," activities, gatherings and closings--these entities compose a workshop. Santa gathers answers from the circle to create the ground rules and after everyone contributes Santa adds her own rule: have fun. I swore I thought the possibility of having fun in 8-hour training in conflict resolution was as good as getting it to snow in mid-July. Well, by that Sunday I've would have frostbite.

The dialogues we had were dynamic and free from judgment. We weren't being told what to say or how to think by our facilitators. We were figuring everything out ourselves. Anytime we felt burnout we would get a boost of energy through light & livelies. Even in our main activities we were able to use role playing, storytelling, art and games to convey the central themes of con-



Jorrell Watkins practices his skills as a conflict resolution workshop leader.

flict resolution. I left the training on Sunday, feeling renewed and confident in my abilities as a leader and my potential growth through RYPP.

The first workshops I did were difficult. I wasn't used to having participants seeking affirmation from me, let alone leading them through themes that I barely knew about myself! However, the wonderful aspect of RYPP workshops is that everyone learns from experience. As my mentor Santa says, "we don't tell the participants what to say or what to do. We pull out the wisdom from within them and they find the answers themselves." I recall dozens of time when I stumbled trying to find answers in others that I already knew myself. Soon enough, I was able to guide participants to their answers and I relied less on the adult facilitators. Those early workshops were very suspenseful and fulfilling. Even when we met upstairs in the exhaustingly hot RPEC office to plan our agenda, I recognized the purpose and importance of it every time.

In time the methods, skills and themes that I shared with others in my community became a part of me. I noticed it when I caught myself avoiding 'you' statements and used an "I-message" instead. Sometimes when I listen to a friend share a sto-

ry with me, I think back to Ram pretending to ignore a youth telling him how they brush their teeth. The themes of conflict resolution: Affirmation, Problem Solving, Cooperation and Communication are not just themes to me, but ways of living.

By the time I was a high school senior, I was well versed as a conflict resolution trainer. I co-led many workshops across Richmond and established myself as a dependable and diligent RYPP trainer. I had some of my most memorable workshops during my senior year; a series with second graders at Fairfield Elementary among them. I was wary at first to be working with a group of participants so young; especially with the topic we were assigned.

As a senior, I didn't know how I could relate to eight year-olds who had trouble with bullying. Bullying was not discussed much when I was child. In fact children were simply expected to deal with it. I knew that was not the right course of action and I was determined to make an impact on those second graders to ensure they would not perpetuate the cycle of bullying.

Surprisingly, the youth made the biggest impact on me. The second graders liked me, to the point they would bicker over who would get to sit next to me in the circle. I enjoyed their company too. The first workshop went extremely well. Santa and I were stumped as to why the school officials thought bullying was such a huge issue. But chaos joined the circle in the next session, as we witnessed the youth horseplaying and teasing each other. Even with all their rowdiness, they were still a pleasure to work with.

In the second workshop session I met a remarkable girl by the name of Taylor who changed my perception of conflict and what is truly valuable.

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RPEC Alumnus

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We were doing an art activity in which all the children were to draw a picture of what bullying look liked. Some of the boys drew pictures of boys fighting and the girls drew pictures of girls fighting girls. I was a little disheartened to see those images but it said a lot about how the youth interpreted bullying and violence.

Among all the pictures Taylor's was the only one who dared to draw something different. When I glance over her shoulder, I saw the caricature of some tall boy and I inquired who or what is was. Taylor told me she was drawing a picture of me. At first I was

startled that she was drawing a picture of me as if I was her interpretation of bullying. However, I looked closer and thought I saw a touch of serenity in this portrait. This young girl, seemingly untouched by bullying or not concerned with negativity, decided to spend her time drawing a picture of me. Dumbfounded I left her to continue working and moved along.

Another little girl saw Taylor's drawing and said, "your picture looks stupid and ugly." She sliced through Taylor's self-esteem. The tears burst from Taylor's eyes and speckled her drawing. I rushed over to her and asked her to tell me what happened. I could not understand

her sorrow. In that moment I was helpless, confused and sad myself. I was on one knee trying to convince Taylor that her picture wasn't ugly or stupid and that everything will be okay. She didn't give in but let out more anguish. Worst of all she became a spectacle for the entire class to laugh and poke fun at. Looking around the room I saw in the children's eyes that any one them could have been Taylor, but they were glad it wasn't them. I looked at my co-facilitators and they seemed as shocked as me. I could only think, "Make her stop crying! Make her stop crying!"

Then empathy hit me. In a moment I was Taylor. I felt the thrill of scribbling with my crayon to compose my masterpiece. I felt proud as the older me looked over my shoulder to inquire about what I was drawing. It felt good to know that someone was interested in something that I was doing. However, as I'm adding the finishing touches my fellow classmate and occasional playmate ridicules my artwork, my creation. Their words diminish all of my hard work and effort. I had been so proud of my work just moments ago, but now everyone around the table are joining the ridicule and telling me that what I made was stupid and ugly. All I wanted was acceptance, a friend, to have fun, to share...but I'm told what I have to offer isn't good enough...maybe I'm not good enough...I'm not good enough.

When those thoughts connected I felt my heart tremble in sorrow. I did what felt natural. I wasn't trying to stop her tears; I wanted to make her feel accepted. I took her picture, reaffirmed how great it was and asked her if I could have the honor of keeping the portrait. Taylor wiped her eyes with her arm. She stopped crying and replied yes. I still have the portrait today.

Preparations begin for Generation Dream 2014

Once again the Richmond Youth's Peace Project's will honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with its annual Educoncert, Generation Dream 2014. The show is presented as part of Richmond's annual "Living the Dream" commemoration.

Again we plan two local performances. One is already scheduled for Friday, Feb. 7, 2014, 7 p.m., at the Richmond Public Library.

We are now searching for talented young artists to perform segments of

about 5 minutes or less: singers, instrumental musicians and groups, dance, short dramatic presentations, and spoken word. All performances must in some way reflect Dr. King's message of peace, nonviolence and social justice.

We will begin work on the show at our regular monthly RYPP meeting on Thursday afternoon, October 17 (location TBD). Auditions are required. Artists (and adult sponsors) should email rypp@rpec.org as soon as possible.

Richmond Youth Peace Project welcomes new trainers

Twenty-nine teens from across the region participated in a nonviolent conflict resolution workshop on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 21-22 at the Fan Free Clinic auditorium.

The workshop was offered by the Richmond Youth Peace Project (RYPP) with the support of the Youth Philanthropy Project and members of RPEC.

Students from about two dozen middle and high schools and colleges

participated. Finishers now qualify to become RYPP conflict resolution trainers. Supervised by members of the adult CR team, they will plan and present CR workshops for children and teens in the coming year.

Any local school, congregation or community center that might like to offer conflict resolution workshops to the young people they serve should contact RPEC's CR coordinator, Santa Sorenson.

Women, War and Peace in Africa

The Women, War, and Peace conference held at VCU was sponsored by RPEC, Virginia Friends of Mali, Sister Cities, and VCU. The highlight of the conference for me was the opening address and film by producer Abigail Disney. Dr. Disney is the granddaughter of Roy Disney, but her first film, "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," made a name for herself as winner of the Tribeca Film Festival's best documentary. It chronicles the story of the women's peace movement in war-torn Liberia.

Dr. Disney (she has a Ph.D. in English literature) is also a peace ac-

tivist and her address was inspiring. She spoke of the need for the stories of peace-builders to be told, of how difficult it was to get the footage for the film because shooting war footage is sexy, but women working for peace is not, and the difficulties of getting it distributed. Ninety-five percent of history is lost, she said, because stories are not highlighted and remembered.

The next day we heard from Liberians who have emigrated to Richmond – to hear from them how war and the women's peace movement have impacted their lives.

Other highlights were panel discussions on girl soldiers and their challenges, women in war and conflict, a workshop on Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC), a panel from the Eastern Mennonite Summer Peacebuilding Institute, and a panel on Conflict Resolution with experts from George Mason and Eastern Mennonite Universities.

—Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez

'Obamacare' Assures Benefits for Insurers

Many among the million Virginians who currently lack health insurance will benefit from the Affordable Care Act, but the equal beneficiaries of the new law will be the insurance companies who masterminded it.

On Nov. 19, 2008, just two weeks after Barack Obama was elected president, America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) "today proposed guaranteed coverage for people with pre-existing medical conditions in conjunction with an enforceable individual coverage mandate."

AHIP also urged "premium support for moderate-income individuals" in the form of "refundable, advanceable tax credits."

In other words, the insurers said, "We'll stop doing the things we're criticized for, if the government will guarantee us an endless supply of new customers with assured payment of our premiums."

And so it came to be.

The insurers' biggest victory, however, is that by making them the keystones of the system, the ACA ensures their continuing dominance of the system. The ACA thus enshrines the concept that health care is not a service but rather a source of profit, and that health care is not the right of every citizen, but rather the privilege of those able to pay for it.

— Charles Robideau

Important Message to Our Readers

Beginning in 2014, we will be transitioning most of you to the electronic newsletter. Please be sure that we have the correct email address on file for you and all other members of your household who wish to receive the electronic newsletter.

Email us your correct email addresses at news@rpec.org, with "enews" in the subject line. We want to be sure that you continue to receive this informative newsletter!

We know that some of our members strongly prefer the paper newsletter, and we understand that! We will continue to print a small number of paper newsletters for those who tell us they wish to get the print paper. If you do want to continue receiving the paper version of the newsletter, instead of the electronic version, be sure to let us know! Email news@rpec.org with a note stating that you wish to continue receiving the printed paper newsletter. Or feel free to give us a call at 232-1002!

Thanks for understanding our desire to save costs. . .and trees!

Note: Be assured that if you share your email, we will not add it to additional email lists or share it with any other group.

Our Mission

The Richmond Peace Education Center is working to build a more peaceful and just community in the Richmond, Virginia area. Since its founding in 1980, the center has been a leading voice for nonviolence and social justice, offering programs on conflict resolution and violence prevention, racial justice, and global issues. RPEC needs your involvement. Contact the office to plug in: rpec@rpec.org or 232-1002. Together, we can build a more peaceful and just community and world.