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City Councilmen Sponsor Forum To Bridge The Racial Divide

By **Domnick Hadley**

City Councilmen believe that government can play a key role in changing the attitudes of those who use "labels" such as African American, Hispanic American and Native American to culturally divide the city and county.

A forum addressing the issues of stereotyping and labeling, and what can be done to eliminate them was held Tuesday, Sept. 26, at the Gem Theatre.

Councilmen Troy Nash, third district-at-large, and Jim Rowland, of the fourth district, facilitated the forum.

The forum is one of many dialogues that are a part of "One Kansas City," a community initiative geared towards improving race relations in Kansas City.

The initiative consists of three components including community dialogues, neighborhood exchanges and youth outreach.

Panelists for Tuesday's discussion included Jake Mascotte, CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield; Mona Perry, employment specialist of the American Indian Council; Roger Gooden, chairperson on the Governor's Council on Aids; Ossco Bolton, a consultant with Move-Up; Karen Pack, local business owner and community activist; and Lala Garcia, board director of the Guadeloupe center.

During the forum, members of the community, and the panel, were given the opportunity to address issues pertaining to labels.

According to Ms. Maria Echaveste, assistant to President Bill Clinton and Deputy Chief of Staff, hostilities based on race and ethnicity present a problem that this country must deal with.

"The tension that contin-

ues to exist with race and ethnicity, is something that we have to cope with. And, we are short of solutions," said Ms. Echaveste. "In order to be a great country we have to find that moral purpose."

According to Ms. Pack, society has been overcome by the existence of labels, and in order to progress, society must eliminate them and begin to work together.

"When I think about all of these labels, I think that we have become a manipulated society," said Ms. Pack. "Society has made us feel that labels are a compliment, but they've been used to divide us."

"If we drop the label and think of ourselves as Americans, then we will be stronger and we can work together," she continued.

Gooden, a member of the panel, stated that in order to actually eliminate labels, individuals must first deal with themselves.

He stated that by being homosexual and AIDS stricken, labels have been placed on him also. He used pride to overcome them.

"We have to first look inward, and then look outward," said Gooden. "We have to accept ourselves, and give people space."

Another issue that divides this nation are the stereotypical attitudes some people direct towards youth.

"When we look at our society, the biggest label we look at is how we label our young people," said Bolton. "We label them as a liability instead of an asset."

"How can we be positive influences for our youth if we don't focus on them," he continued.

But contrary to the common belief that labels are wrong and should be eliminated, some believe that

labels are key to finding the problem that exists in society.

"I think labels are useful. Labels help identify where disparities exist," said Kelly Pinkham, a community participant. "To give up labels is to give up the means to solve these problems."

Society has to look beyond race in order to break the walls of division.

"We are all human, and we are all God's children," said a community participant. "When we learn how to love, we will learn how to accept people, and not think about what color they are."



FORUM PANEL . . . Councilmen Troy Nash and Jim Rowland held a forum to address the issues of stereotyping and labeling on Tuesday, Sept. 26, at the Gem theatre. Panelists and the community were given the opportunity to voice their opinions on the issue, and also offers solutions to eliminate the problem. Shown, from left to right, are Ossco Bolton, a Move-Up consultant; Mona Perry, employment specialist for the American Indian Council; Jake Mascotte, CEO of Blue Cross-Blue Shield; Karen Pack, local business owner and community activist; Roger Gooden, chairperson on the Governor's Council on AIDS; and Lala Garcia, a Guadeloupe Center Board Director member. - - CALL photo by Rex Purefoy