

## Howell's 'Hateful Things' exhibit tramples racial stereotypes

Local leaders hope display, dialogue one year after KKK auction will erase negative image.

Jon Zemke / Special to The Detroit News

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**HOWELL** -- Memorabilia from the Ku Klux Klan will be back in public view at a downtown business next week, starting on the national holiday honoring civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Organizers of the display say the intent is to help combat racism.

"We are hoping to educate and engage people," said Pat Convery, president of the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce.

The traveling exhibit from Ferris State University's Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia will be at the Howell Opera House for the King Day observance Monday. It is the first event in an effort by community leaders to address issues of diversity.

A diversity awareness workshop program also is in the works, although the Howell City Council hasn't decided whether to contribute public money to the effort.

Last year, an auction of Ku Klux Klan robes and other paraphernalia planned at the Ole Gray Nash Auction House on the King Day observance created an outcry and reignited perceptions of racism in Howell. The business rescheduled the auction.

"Hateful Things," the traveling Jim Crow exhibit, contains 39 items from the 19th century to present characterizing African-Americans in stereotypical ways.

"The response to the exhibit in our viewings has saddened viewers, but has been favorable, given the nature of the items," said Ferris professor John Thorp, who organizes the exhibit tours. The exhibit went on tour about a year ago, visiting mostly college campuses to heighten awareness and understanding.

"It's just going to cause more uproar because of Howell's history," said Nancy Anderson, 49, a downtown business owner.

However, Howell resident Chris Cotter, 47, said the display will be no different than the historic artifacts shown to educate at the Holocaust Museum in West Bloomfield.

The event is free, paid for by the Livingston 2001 Diversity Council.

Local leaders are also in the planning stages of setting up "A Community Conversation About Diversity" in mid-April.

The one-day event will offer diversity awareness, leadership and community development training for leaders and members of the Howell-area community.

Livingston 2001 Diversity Council, Howell Area Chamber of Commerce and the Howell City Council would pay the National Conference of Community Justice \$15,000 to put on the program.

The Howell City Council is still debating whether to pay its end of the deal -- \$3,000.

There is a history of KKK activity in Livingston County. Robert Miles, a former Klan Grand Dragon, lived in Cohoctah Township, north of Howell, where he burned crosses and held KKK rallies. He died in 1992.

*Detroit News Staff Writer Valerie Olander contributed to this report. Jon Zemke is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.*