

## **Human Rights Banquet To Tell The Story Of Race Reconciliation**

The 18<sup>th</sup> annual Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations Human Rights Banquet will feature the amazing story of how the people and the City of Rock Hill, South Carolina corrected a racial injustice after 54 years in municipal court on January 28, 2015.

The story began in February 1961 when eight African American college students from Rock Hill Friendship Junior College joined with Thomas Gaither from the Congress of Racial Equality with a sit-in at the local lunch counter of the McCrory Variety Store challenging the segregation policy of “Whites Only”. They were arrested and charged and convicted of trespassing and breach of peace.

They became known as the “Friendship 9”.

One year earlier a group of students had conducted a sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina at a segregated lunch counter, were arrested and bailed out of jail. This incident galvanized student movements around the country.

What made the “Friendship 9” different from other student sit-ins was that they refused to pay the individual \$100 fines into the city coffers but instead to serve their 30-day sentence at hard labor. Civil rights activists across the South adopted their “Jail, Not Bail” tactic.

Fast-forwarding to 2014 and 2015 when Kim Johnson, the author of “No Fear for Freedom: The Story of Friendship 9” convinced York and Union County Prosecutor Kevin Brackett to address the injustice. Rock Hill Municipal Court Judge John C. Hayes presided over the January 28, 2015 municipal court hearing.

In his ruling before seven of the 9 men, Judge Hayes ruled that the 9 men had been wrongly accused and he vacated the sentences’ before a packed courtroom. In his ruling, Judge Hayes said: “We cannot rewrite history, but we can right history.”

In apologizing to the men and the Court, Prosecutor Beckett stated: “There was only one reason that these men were arrested. There was only one reason that they were charged and convicted of trespassing, and that is because they were black.”

Rock Hill City Mayor Doug Echols in a correspondent with Tony Stewart the day after Judge Hayes’ ruling stated: “We had a great day yesterday. It was another great day for our community.”

A few years ago, Congressman John Lewis gave the keynote at the Rock Hill Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast. Mayor Echols presented Lewis with the key to the city and apologized for the 1961 incident.

The KCTFHR is pleased to announce that Rock Hill Mayor Doug Echols will be the keynote speaker at this year’s annual human rights banquet on April 13. His topic will be **Rock Hills’ Civil Rights Journey From 1961 to 2015: The Story of the “Friendship 9”**

**MAYOR DOUG ECHOLS’ BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Mayor Echols is in his fifth four-year term as mayor of Rock Hill. Prior to becoming mayor, he served two terms on the city council. Echols is the past president of the Municipal Association of South Carolina representing 270 cities and towns in South Carolina and in 2012 he served a term as the President of the Association of South Carolina Mayors.

He previously served as a member of the Board of Directors of the National League of Cities and was Chair of the National League of Cities' Leadership Training Council.

Mayor Echols and the Rock Hill City Council are partnering with regional businesses on a redevelopment project on 1000 acres of land that represents a \$600 million private investment. The project includes 250 acres for the construction of various public recreation and sports venues.

Among his many public service accomplishments, Echols initiated Rock Hills Commission for Children and Youth and the Mayor's Task Force for Greenways, Trails and Sidewalks.

Echols had a long career as an educator and administrator in both the public schools as well as higher education. Doug is the past president of the NCAA Division II Commissioners Association.

Echols holds a B.S. degree in Biology and Physical Education from Mars Hill College, a Masters Degree in Education Administration from Western Carolina University, and an Education Specialist Degree in Administration from Winthrop University. He received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Winthrop University.

The banquet is set for Monday, April 13, 2015 at the Best Western Coeur d'Alene Inn with the reception beginning at 5 PM and dinner at 6 PM.

In addition to the keynote, the evening will include presentation of civil rights awards, musical performance and introduction of the NIC minority student scholarship recipients for 2014-2015.

Banquet tables may be purchased for \$500 or \$1,000 or individual tickets are \$40. Contact information: (208) 292-2359 or 765-3932 or P O Box 2725, CDA, ID 83816

All proceeds go to the Human Rights Education Institute for educational programs and minority college student scholarships.