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March 27, 2011
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SIX TO BE HONORED FOR WORK BRIDGING DIVERSE GROUPS

By Cherise M. Newsome
The Virginian-Pilot

A Portsmouth community activist will be among six individuals honored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities on Thursday.

The honorees are recognized "for their work that builds bridges across differences," said Jonathan Zur, president and CEO of the organization.

This is the 47th year that the organization, formerly the Virginia Region of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, will tout the efforts of a mix of local activists, business leaders and community organizations. The gala will be held at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott.

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"We want to make sure our honorees reflect the diversity of the community and are at a time in their careers and lives when they are deserving of the awards," Zur said.

One common trait among the honorees is personal commitment and hands-on work in worthy causes, Zur said.

Take Portsmouth's Joe B. Fleming, pastor of Third Baptist Church on Godwin Street.

He has a long resume of community involvement: has served as chairman for the Portsmouth Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the Board of the Red Cross of the Southeastern Virginia, the Electoral Board for the city of Portsmouth, and the Board of Directors for the Salvation Army of Portsmouth. He also has been a board member of the Center for Community Development, Inc.

He serves as a senior pastor and said he considers his community efforts a part of his ministry work.

"I've always felt that a pastor who serves his congregation should know the agencies and people who make a difference in the community," he said.

His church participates in an anti-homeless program and allows people to use the church as shelter during various weeks throughout the year.

Another honoree, Ken Newman, has worked to improve literacy among minority children.

"I'm really driven to make sure the children can read

honorees

Hampton Roads honorees for this year's 47th annual Humanitarian Awards include:

Helen E. Dragas, chief executive officer of The Dragas Companies

Joe B. Fleming, senior pastor of Third Baptist Church in Portsmouth

J. Jerry Kantor, retired president of Broudy-Kantor Beverage Co.

Ken Newman, executive vice president of Metro Machine Corp.

The Rumi Forum will accept the Jeffrey B. Spence Award for Interfaith Understanding, and DOMA Technologies will receive the Distinguished Merit Citation.

and have the resources to make that happen," said Newman, executive vice president of Metro Machine in Norfolk. Newman is current vice chair and a former board chair of the Southside Boys and Girls Club. He also is founding chairman of the Norfolk Education Foundation and has served as community sponsor of the Southside Senior Center, and past president of the Berkley Advisory Board.

His company has been supportive of his efforts, he said, and believes others should do more to better their communities.

"If you have the ability to contribute to people that are less capable than yourself, please do that in whatever endeavor you see fit," he said.

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