

CHARITY SPOTLIGHT

A World of Welcome

By Susan Mix



There are probably a lot of people in Wellesley who haven't heard of the Dee Brown affair, and probably an equally large number of people who wish they hadn't. But the 1990 incident- in which Celtics first-round draft pick Dee Brown was mistaken by Wellesley police for a bank robbery suspect and forced to the ground at gunpoint- was the spark that led to the formation of World of Wellesley, an organization that for 29 years has been committed to exploring our many cultures, religions, and ways of life; and making Wellesley a welcoming place for everyone. Dee Brown's experience prompted black residents within the community to push the Wellesley Board of Selectmen to create a Human Rights Study committee. The group met weekly and ultimately made recommendations to establish a Human Rights Committee and a Police Community Relations Committee. When those recommendations weren't implemented, Tere Tedesco, who is of Filipino heritage and had participated on the Human Rights Study committee, decided to take the initiative to raise awareness and change attitudes about race and diversity by organizing the first World of Wellesley activity. The half-day discussion on diversity, held at the Wellesley Community Center in 1991, began a long journey of education, awareness, and change in Wellesley.

Since its founding, World of Wellesley has provided opportunities to experience and celebrate various kinds of diversity: cultural, economic, religious, racial, and ethnic. According to its mission statement, "The World of Wellesley is dedicated to making Wellesley a welcoming community where diversity is celebrated and appreciated. This is done in conjunction with many Wellesley Institutions. Together we sponsor events, projects and programs that emphasize the value in exploring our many cultures, religions and ways of life." Many of these programs, such as the Wellesley Community Gathering, the Wellesley Multicultural Festival, and the Community Read, are designed to include young people in the conversations about human differences. One of the most well-known, the 5th Grade Essay Program, invites all Wellesley fifth graders to write about an experience as an ally, having or being a role model, or learning about an activist who inspired them to understand cultural or racial diversity. Last year more than 400 students participated, and thirteen were honored for their work by the Wellesley School Committee. In addition to the Wellesley Public Schools, the Wellesley Free Library, Wellesley Rotary, Wellesley Community Center, and Police and Fire Departments are just some of the many other key community organizations that partner with World of Wellesley to organize events year-round.

Michelle Chalmers, the current President of World of Wellesley, notes that "the success of the mission can only be reached by listening to and learning from all Wellesley residents and supporting what is possible for making this community a welcome and inclusive space for all. We invite everyone to reach out to the World of Wellesley, attend our meetings, invite us to coffee, email us or message us on Facebook. Your voice is very important and we look forward to hearing from you soon." To learn more about the World of Wellesley's upcoming events, or to get involved, visit their web site at <https://worldofwellesley.org/>.



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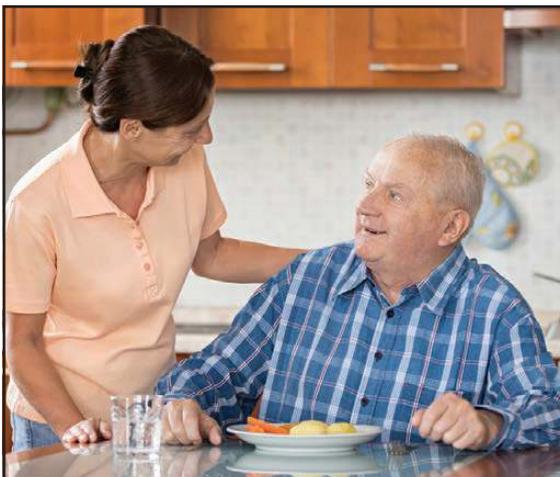
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