

Diversity Day A Pledge Of Commitment

By CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN

Diversity comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, and forms. No matter how it is defined, six Woods Hole science institutions have declared they want more of it.

Yesterday, both inside and outside the Lillie Auditorium at the Marine Biological Laboratory, employees of those six institutions and residents came together to discuss ways to achieve their goals and celebrate what has been done thus far at the first annual Diversity Day.

Two years ago, the six institutions--Marine Biological Laboratory, National Marine Fisheries Service, Sea Education Association, United States Geological Survey, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, and Woods Hole Research Center--signed a memorandum of understanding committing them to attract and retain a more diverse workforce.

John K. Bullard, president of the Sea Education Association, said this represented the first time all six institutions put their signatures on one document to work toward one goal. The fact that the goal is to improve diversity is significant, he said.

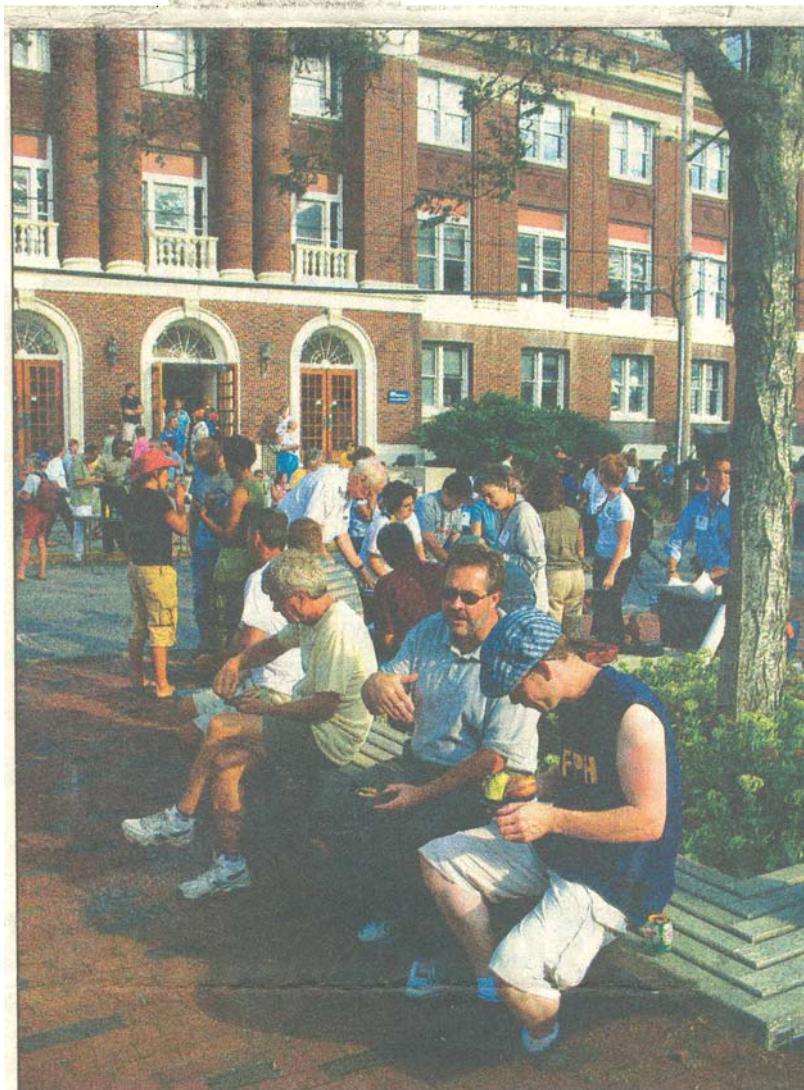
Throughout his career, Mr. Bullard said, he has encountered homogenous work environments. At Sea Education Association, it is no different than when he was the mayor of New Bedford or director of the Office of Sustainable Development and Intergovernmental Affairs at NOAA.

"We all face the same issues," he said. "Woods Hole and its scientific institutions are not as diverse as we could be. If we can be more diverse, it would be to the advantage of all of us."

By increasing diversity, he said, it allows for different points of views to be shared, something vital toward the progress of science.

Guest speaker Thomas Windham agreed with this assessment, as diversity is a major focus for his employer, the National Science Foundation, where he is the senior advisor for science and engineering workforce. Much of his work addresses the need to improve diversity while developing strategies to achieving it in the fields of science, math, technology, and engineering.

The NSF awards grants to institutions and people who promote the participation of minority groups in the fields of science. These grants can go to non-minorities, he said, as long as their



CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN/ENTERPRISE

At yesterday's first annual Diversity Day in Woods Hole, employees at six scientific institutions, along with residents, enjoyed a street festival celebrating the pursuit of diversity. The festival featured free food, prizes and Brazilian music played by A Banda De Ipanema.

projects are encouraging broader participation among minority groups.

Through inclusion, he said, people become empowered and diversity can be achieved. The beauty of diversity is that it brings together people with different backgrounds who have new ideas and unique personal experiences that can be used as a resource in decision-making, he said.

To be successful in attracting diverse groups, he said, companies must make the work relevant. He said institutions need to talk about the economic benefits of working in the scientific fields and how it contributes to society.

He mentioned the March on Washington, which he attended on August 28, 1963. "We forget, it wasn't just about freedom. It was about jobs," he said. "We need to talk about employment opportunities as a way of life and earning a living.

Diversity Day



Thomas Windham of the National Science Foundation speaks about the importance of diversity in the fields of science.

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That motivates students."

Before working at NSF, Dr. Windham was director and principal investigator of a multi-ethnic learning and mentoring program called Significant Opportunities in Atmospheric Research and Science (SOARS) run through the University Corporation in Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado.

SOARS is a federal program offering undergraduate minority students the opportunity to do a 10-week summer internship where they learn about the atmosphere and related sciences. Each student has a number of mentors and works with established scientists who expose them to nuances of the field.

Much of the work done at SOARS, he said, motivates these minority students to pursue careers in the scientific fields. In addition, it instills a confidence that builds leadership qualities and inspires creativity, he said.

Now that he is at the NSF, Dr. Windham said that the pursuit of diversity is a necessity.

Pragmatically, it makes sense because it is achievable.

Prudently, he said, it is a wise investment. "It will payoff," he said.

Ethically, if we believe in a notion of a strong democracy, he said, it must be done.

And finally, aesthetically, when institutions pursue diversity, "it feels good and looks good," he said.

To reach the goal of creating a diverse, internationally competitive

and globally engaged workforce of scientists and engineers, he said, requires the cooperation of institutions like the ones in Woods Hole.

After Dr. Windham's lecture, the audience heard a panel discussion in which eight employees in Woods Hole spoke about their perspectives on diversity.

Gary Borisy, the director at MBL, said that science is an international activity that transcends individual differences. "We need to dip into the gene pool to advance science," he said. "Tolerance empowers us to learn more."

While Harold Foster of the National Marine Fisheries Service was appreciative of these initial efforts to improve diversity, he said, he hoped that the day was not an aberration.

Growing up in China, Wen-lu Zhu, an associate scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, said she came to America because it is a leader in many fields of science and technology.

Since she has lived here, she said, "America is the best example of diversity... When you have such a diverse place, recognizing that it is not perfect, you attract the best talent. For America to remain a leader in the scientific fields, she said, it must keep diversity a priority.

In Woods Hole, six institutions have done just that and are working on ways to best achieve that goal.

Residents interested in finding out more about this endeavor can visit www.woodsholediversity.org.