

Morristown rally urges tolerance in community

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Sixteen men, women and children stood in the Morristown Green last night with pieces of a collective message stamped on their chests.

The group, wearing white T-shirts with a single letter imprinted on the front and back, formed a human chain to display their collective statement: "No Human Being Is Illegal."

The formation was part of a vigil marking the one-year anniversary of an anti-illegal immigration rally held in front of town hall, in effect turning that message on its head.

"The issues are still going on," said Aimee Sostowski, program development coordinator for Wind of the Spirit and one of the organizers of last night's event. "We are tying (the events held) one year ago to the current challenges ahead."

The vigil was nearly a mile away from town hall, where hundreds gathered one year ago at a highly charged anti-illegal immigration rally that drew national attention.

Speakers last year criticized the lack of federal enforcement of immigration laws, viewing the addition of illegal immigrants as a stress on town resources and the economy. Opponents championed the human rights of all immigrants, including those who were undocumented.

The anti-illegal immigration has led to unreported crimes and other abuses within the illegal immigrant community in Morristown, according to Sostowski.

"We are very aware these issues are still going on," Sostowski said. "People are still affected, and we want to raise some awareness about that."

More than 50 people yesterday gathered at the Green, where they wore T-shirts and held signs denouncing the 287(g) application Morristown submitted to federal authorities to deputize its police staff as federal immigration agents.

Speakers lectured in both English and Spanish, carrying their message urging the town to adopt a more welcoming disposition toward immigrants in the community.

They also blared "Deportee," a song written by Woody Guthrie about what he considered the racist treatment and press coverage of 28 illegal immigrant farm workers killed in a California plane crash on Jan. 29, 1948.

The vigil, which moved to the site of last year's rally, caught the attention of bystanders who were sympathetic to the organizers' cause.

"This country is full of immigrants and for one community to forget that is a shame," said Jeff Stone, a Morristown resident walking through the park during the rally.

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