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## Forum to focus on gangs, prejudice

BY MEGAN REITER  
STAFF WRITER

DINGMANS FERRY — By exposing discrimination and gang activity, several local organizations are trying to stop both harmful behaviors from spreading in their communities.

“The way you respond to gangs in the community is very, very similar to the way you respond to discrimination in the community,” said Robert Venezia, Ph.D., of the Tri-State Unity Coalition, one of the organizers of a public forum on discrimination and gang activity. The event in Pike County is scheduled for March 1 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Pocono Environmental Education Center, Route 209, Dingmans Ferry.

From hate graffiti discovered along Route 739, to gang-related graffiti found at a public spot in Matamoras, Dr. Venezia said the public needs to be aware of how to deal with discriminatory individuals.

“They go to where they’re tolerated and where there’s no resistance,” he said.

Public awareness of discrimination and gangs is vital, Dr. Venezia said, because, “as in any population of people, any community, no community is immune.”

The forum will give people a chance both to listen to experts and to learn from a hands-on presentation.

The speakers will be Michael M. Leonard Sr., a criminal justice consultant, and Letitia Lladloc, Ph.D., a multicultural studies instructor at Gratz College. In addition, Rallying Youth Organizers Together Against Rape, which is affiliated with Safe Haven of Pike County, will perform a socio-drama focusing on gay-bashing and sexual harassment.

“A socio-drama is interactive theater,” said Cindy Stine, educational outreach coordinator/child advocate for Safe Haven of Pike County. “It engages the audience in understanding the problems and being part of the solution.”

The actors will stay in character during the socio-drama while they give audience members a chance to ask questions and express their reactions, Ms. Stine said.

“I think anytime we can (bring) people in a room and talk about issues openly, it’s always a positive,” she said. “You don’t need to accept everything, but we need to have tolerance with each other.”

For more information on the forum, contact the Tri-State Unity Coalition at 686-5555 or [www.tristateunity.org](http://www.tristateunity.org).

Contact the writer: [mreiter@timeshamrock.com](mailto:mreiter@timeshamrock.com)

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