

Tear Down The Walls News...

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Teaching teens to "Tear Down The Walls"

St. Louis based Jewish rocker Rick Recht is a man on a mission. He is already a popular Jewish music artist giving more than 150 performances a year that touch people all over the world. He wants more. He wants his music to be a tool for bringing all people together. That doesn't mean that he is chasing the charts and changing to suit the moods of popular music. Recht is at the head of a musical initiative aimed at educating youth and giving them the tools to fight discrimination and bias. Recht's newest album is entitled *Tear Down the Walls* and its theme is breaking the barriers of bias that separate all people.

"I'm an educator," said Recht. "music is my medium"

After releasing two critically acclaimed secular albums Recht returned to his Jewish roots in 1999 when he released *Tov*, his first non secular effort. *Tov* means good in Hebrew and Recht saw his transition to faith based music as a natural progression of who he was and what he wanted to say. Since then he has been quite successful. Recht has combined high energy

rock music with the themes and lessons of Jewish culture. He sees *Tear Down the Walls* as a natural extension of what he is already doing. However, he was not satisfied with just infusing his music with a message. Working in conjunction with the Anti-Defamation League he has made *Tear Down the Walls* into more than an album. It is the first step in a project aimed at changing the attitudes of teens toward discrimination and bias.

According to its website, www.teardownthewalls.org, 'Tear Down the Walls' is, "a unique, 2-phase initiative utilizing the power of popular rock music to excite teens about their role in the work of breaking down bias and prejudice in their communities." Upon the album's release it was distributed to more than a thousand Jewish youth throughout the St. Louis metro area. All of those young people are invited, along with the public, to a January 19 scripted performance at the University

City High School auditorium dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This Rock Against Racism concert will include Recht and many of those who came together on the 'Tear Down the Walls' album. Multicultural artists from the Jewish, African-American and Christian communities will come together in a theatrical performance using music, the spoken word, individual vocalists, choirs and activists.

"This is not going to be a showcase," said Recht. "This will be people performing together to get the message out."

As uplifting as the music is and the performance will be, Recht and the ADL see them as only the beginning. Throughout this effort they will be recruiting youth to participate in the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference @ Institute. Those youth volunteers will be given training designed to transform them into change agents in their schools and communities.

"I want to give direction in what I'm trying to teach," said Recht. "We are trying to crack the ceiling between awareness and action."

Recht has come to believe that all cultures and all people value social justice. Everyone is aware of the problem but few know or understand the tools and resources they have at their disposal to combat the problem. By combining music with training and ongoing recruitment of interested youth, Recht sees a way to break the cycle of inactivity. He approached the ADL with his vision because he knew they provided tolerance training to schools, organizations and businesses. By applying that training to youth on a broad scale, Recht believes that change is bound to come.

"If we can get teens to do it, everyone else will follow," he said.

Denise DeCou, Project Director of the World of Difference @ Institute in Missouri, says at the young people who participate in the training will have "eye opening, emotional experiences."

The training will be given in 2 hour blocks over several weeks between February and May. During the training participants will, "confront differences and sources of bias," said DeCou.

By the end of the training they will be able to recognize bias and have the skills to challenge it and create a non bias environment. Each training session will be conducted by 2-4 trained facilitators and will progress from participants challenging their own bias to understanding factors that contribute to unearned privilege and discrimination. By the end of the training the students will have the capacity to be leaders and part of the change process.



St. Louis rock musician Rick Recht is working with area students to learn how to overcome bias and prejudice in their lives, in their schools, and in their communities.

"We are trying to create a self-perpetuating cycle of change agents," said DeCou.

She has seen it work before and cites schools that have had discrimination problems among students being turned around by the injection of students who participated in the training.

By starting with youth, DeCou believes that a new wave can be created. Changing attitudes and minimizing prejudice and injustice on personal levels will, in turn, eradicate systemic discrimination.

After the training each student volunteer will be supported by the ADL in their efforts to challenge bias. They will have a menu of actions they can initiate for the cause. They will be expected to do everything from challenging prejudice when they see it to organizing events or starting clubs that focus on anti-discrimination. Just as importantly they will recruit students from all backgrounds to take the training. By each student duplicating him or herself they will create momentum for lasting change.

The music from the *Tear Down the Walls* CD will be used in the training and Recht himself will participate when his schedule permits. The students will be required to build multicultural coalitions. Although the first phase of the initiative concentrates on Jewish youth there is a focus on including African-American youth as well. According to Recht the shared heritage of discrimination against both groups makes them natural allies in the fight for social justice.