



Dave Dieter/Huntsville Times

Members of the Japanese community in Huntsville display traditional dress during the Unity Parade in downtown Huntsville.

Small, spirited Unity Parade crowd walks and talks about getting along

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All ideas were welcome — and many were present — at the Unity Parade Saturday afternoon through downtown Huntsville.

Political, social and religious leaders and followers held banners proclaiming unity and marched

together around Big Spring International Park and by the old courthouse, walking and talking about getting along.

Metro Unity '97, a group of about 40 volunteers, sponsored the parade as part of Unity Month. Walter Peavy, a local pastor and the group's chairman, said the turnout at the parade gave him hope his goals are being accomplished.

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Dave Dieter/Huntsville Times

Carrying the Philippines flag in the Unity Parade through downtown Huntsville Saturday are Mark Vale, left, and Andy Cruz. Metro Unity '97, a group of about 40 volunteers, sponsored the parade as part of Unity Month.

Unity

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"You see, all the time I talk about unity," Peavy said as he walked in front of several cars and trucks and about 150 fellow marchers and riders. "And to see these people, it shows that they care, too."

Mayors appear

Huntsville Mayor Loretta Spencer walked beside Peavy, and Madison Mayor Chuck Yancura rode in a limousine near the front.

Local law enforcement and safety officers rode in the parade, joining local high school bands, faculty members and cheerleaders. Several churches carried their messages.

National flags from Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam were

waved by marchers wearing those countries' traditional dress.

"I don't know what it will take for people to forget their personal greed and personal ambition to help others," said marcher Herb Dixon, a Republican who says he will run for Congress, "but that's what we need. To get people to help other people. . . ."

Yancura leaned out the car window and waved to a few of the 30 to 40 people on the sidewalk watching the parade.

Political unity

"What I think we need is something to bring political groups together," he said. "This is great, but we also need political unity."

Peavy said the unity group is part of a lifelong goal to promote understanding among all people. The group sponsored a unity breakfast with religious leaders earlier this month and is putting

together a full-time center to deal with divisive issues, he said.

"We want to be able to soften the blow when things happen," Peavy said, "to give a headquarters for efforts that bring people together when there might be trouble."

About 150 people were together Saturday, riding or marching, through the streets. One of them, Rahi Hiebert, pushed her daughter, Samineh, in a stroller, along the route.

"I wanted to bring her here," Hiebert, a member of the Bahai faith, said of her 2½-year-old daughter. "They learn things very young, and this is the start. Our religion teaches world unity, so this is something we wanted to join."

Peavy said he hopes more people — of all religions, races and beliefs — will join the efforts.

"I feel the beginning of love here," he said. "This is a dream come true for me."