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Economic Issues Addressed by Interracial Team

Deborah Spradley and her business partner, Barbara Rugen, both love to work on issues that are important to making Cincinnati a better place to live. In order to build on that shared interest they recently announced their collaboration as The Zebra Team.

In a troubled economy everyone is more focused on getting a fair share, or a piece of the pie. “Often the same piece of pie is the target of multiple groups. The Zebra Team is trained to listen, learn and identify ways that lead to consensus,” says Rugen. “Our specialty is preventing and defusing conflict before it escalates.”

Spradley and Rugen believe that local economic and political differences require “more than slide presentations.” The team relies on unique, proven methods to accomplish maximum results by listening and tuning in to the deeper concerns, unexpressed attitudes and feelings. This leads to uncovering the hidden pathways to productive collaboration.

As market researchers who have conducted over 1,000 market research studies for Fortune 500 companies and not-for-profit organizations, Spradley and Rugen first met at a meeting of the Qualitative Research Consultants Association. Subsequently, according to Spradley, “Barbara and I seemed to call upon each other when diverse or ethnic research was needed. We jokingly called ourselves the *Zebra Team*, one black woman and one white woman dealing with economic and community development issues.”

Following the racial unrest and protests in 2001, The Cincinnati Enquirer initiated the Neighbor-to-Neighbor discussions which required skilled facilitators in many communities. Barbara Rugen was selected to play a vital role in facilitating important discussions and training other facilitators. Deborah was a facilitator in N2N as well. The Zebra Team now concentrates on the dynamics of bringing diverse groups together to discover underlying motivators and shed light on ways to get those groups working together on the business of improving conditions in Cincinnati.

“Deb and I have the background and the passion for engaging and reconciling diverse groups of people,” said Dr. Rugen, “and our team also provides training for companies, municipalities, schools, and other facilitators in methodologies to foster communication between people in ‘us vs. them’ situations.”

Spradley added, “I have been a resident of greater Cincinnati for almost 40 years. In the past few years, the city has gone through a transformation from a ‘big, small town’, to a viable big city image that can rival other larger cities. The excitement that is being seen in the downtown district is something that can make our city a destination point for people looking for vacations, entertainment, or family outings. We hope to expedite that transformation by enabling business and community leaders to choose truly effective solutions that rise out of new understanding among diverse constituents.”

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