

Midland Peace Legacy

The City of Midland, Michigan, has a peace heritage that reaches back more than 50 years in large part because of our efforts with Nonviolent Peaceforce – Midland. Two examples illustrate Midland’s early path on its journey to becoming an International City of Peace.

It began with an early trailblazer in the 1960s. Helen M. Casey, Midlander and Peace Activist, educated community members about the need for peace and nonviolence initiatives both locally and internationally. She helped form the Michigan Faith Resistance Organization, as well as the Michigan Peace Team that evolved to become the Meta Peace Team <https://www.metapeaceteam.org/>. Helen’s peacebuilding efforts led her to oppose nuclear weapons and militarism. In fact, she was arrested ten times for peace and justice actions and jailed three times.

The second example began in 1998; it was known as the Midland County Gang and Violence Prevention Partnership. It educated community members about the need for peace and nonviolence. The Pledge of Nonviolence was a tangible product of that work. It is now known as the Midland Area Community Foundation Violence Prevention Partnership (VPP). Since its inception, roughly 12,000 students have been impacted each year. It recently held its annual planning meeting to “actively promote the safety and wellbeing of its citizens by preventing youth violence through awareness, education, collaboration, and involvement” www.midlandfoundation.org/initiative/violenceprevention.

To honor and continue the work Helen Casey started, committed citizens of Midland established The Helen M. Casey Center for Nonviolence in 2003. Its mission statement was aspirational: “To promote the practice of nonviolence and nonviolent conflict resolution as a way of life at the personal, local, state, and global levels”. Throughout the years, The Helen M. Casey Center for Nonviolence grew to become an organization dedicated to developing the understanding of nonviolent conflict resolution as a way of life. Early on, the organization held events that supported Interfaith Gatherings, Art as an Avenue to Understanding Others, and presentations on Mindfulness and Dialogue as avenues to conflict resolution.

The nonviolence movement continued to gain momentum. Nonviolent Peaceforce, an international nongovernmental organization, was formed with the mission, “Transforming the World’s Response to Conflict” www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org. It held a 2002 Convening Event in Surajkund, India, with peace advocates from 49 countries. The first team was on the ground in Sri Lanka in 2003.

In 2011, also in memory of Helen Casey, Nonviolence Peaceforce was created under the leadership of Jeanne Lound Schaller. Its goal was helping people locally and internationally in building better communities for individuals and families.



Nonviolence Peaceforce—Midland Members

Nonviolent Peaceforce—Midland created public awareness in various other ways. Beginning in 2014, several chapter members volunteered in Midland-area elementary, middle, and high schools to educate and develop skills in nonviolent practices. Interactive and engaging, the lesson topics included anti-bullying, empathy, and leadership. Our mission is to give students an opportunity to integrate tools for creating peace in their lives and to help others do the same.

In 2014, Jeanne Schaller became a Rotary Peace Fellow and received a Professional Development Certificate in Peace and Conflict Resolution from Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. She then became an Honorary Member of the Rotary Club of Midland, Michigan. It was at this time that the partnership between Midland Rotary and Nonviolent Peaceforce—Midland was formed. The two organizations have worked closely together since 2015. Tangible evidence of the strong relationship can be found in jointly sponsored peacebuilding and conflict resolution training, work on a Global Grant for South Sudan (ongoing), organizing community events, annual proclamation renewal by City Council, and sponsoring an annual Celebration of Peace Day in September (since 2021).

Bringing Conflict Resolution Training to the Midland Community



NPMC and Midland Rotary collaborate to teach Conflict Resolution Training at First United Methodist Church in Midland, MI (2017).



"Creating Peace by Practicing Peace"
Conflict Resolution Training provided by NPMC and Midland Rotary at St. John's Episcopal Church in Midland, MI (2016)

The Rotary Club of Midland was encouraged by the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Club presidents, Kevin Kendrick and Tawny Ryan Nelb, to recognize that Rotary International is an *international* service organization. They created awareness of the importance of serving both locally and globally in its motto of "service above self".

In 2018 the Club chartered the Peace & Conflict Resolution Committee, now known as the Peacebuilding Committee. The committee chair, Gail Hoffman, also serves as the District Peace & Conflict Resolution Champion, Foundation Peace Fellowships Chair, an IEP Ambassador, and is the recent recipient of the Donald MacRae Community Peace Award. The award honors the contributions of Halifax Rotarian Donald MacRae, who at the International Convention in 1918, proposed that Rotary become an agent for the promotion of goodwill and peace among nations. This was the first time that an international vision of Rotary was publicly expressed.

Rotary Club of Midland and District 6310 are proud to be partnering with Nonviolent Peaceforce—Midland. Our community's vision statement is "An Inclusive Community. Together. Forward. Bold. An Exceptional Place Where Everyone Thrives". Working together, we will further create awareness and encourage action to "foster positive expressions of peace, allowing humans to flourish and providing avenues for more people to achieve their full potential" (2023 Proclamation).

ADDENDUM

Midland's Peace Legacy would not be complete without mention of past activities focused on *inclusivity*. There are several.

People-to-People was most active under the leadership of the Teot's (Art, Hazel, and Deb). Jim Mentele, member of Nonviolent Peaceforce, was president for some years and on the board for many. German, Polish, Azerbaijan, and Malta diplomats would visit and stay in local homes from two to four days. The Menteles hosted not only diplomats but also five young Russian entrepreneurs selected by the Open World Leadership Center, an arm of the US Congress and the Russian Leadership Development, for a weeklong overview of US instances of manufacturing, agriculture, retail, information processing, finance, patents, education, economic development agencies, and culture.

Each year Northwood University would host "Night of ..." with a theme dinner, speaker, music, and artifacts. For seven months of the year, People-to-People had a speaker on cultural topics open to the public. The Midland Chapter of People-to-People folded about three years ago. The National organization is still active, but there is not much activity locally.

Chinese Culture Ongoing Program (CCOP) was established by Ms. Pat Chao to expose Americans to Chinese culture with classes in music, cuisine, dance, language, clothing, and calligraphy and to give demonstrations of those arts and games at free programs at the Midland Center for the Arts. (These events were free to allow people without much disposable income to participate. More than one family in the audience made the comment that this was the only time they could bring the children to see inside the Center for the Arts. The program was funded by the Gerstacker Foundation, the Dow Foundation, and the Michigan Council for Arts & Cultural Affairs.)

We gave presentations in schools, retirement communities, and businesses on several occasions. Each year we brought at least one professional performer from Taiwan or China. We participated in a number of events sponsored by the Tri-Cities Chinese Association. CCOP provided the live music and organized the foods for the Appreciation Ceremony of the "Reflections of China: Far East Meets West" on March 26, 2008, at the Midland Center for the Arts. Tri-City Chinese Association is still active and giving classes and celebrations of major Chinese holidays.

Midland Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice was co-initiated and then led by Jeanne Lound Schaller. It focused on the UN Decade (2000-2009) for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. Choosing a Culture of Understanding was co-initiated and then led by Jeanne Lound Schaller. It was comprised of Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

Japanese Sister City was formed in 1981. The City of Midland maintains a Sister City relationship with the City of Handa, Japan. The Handa-Midland sister city relationship began when The Dow Chemical Company considered a plan to locate a manufacturing facility in Handa. The mayor of Handa at that time was interested in knowing what kind of neighbor Dow would be to his community. After a visit to Midland, Handa became our community's sister city, a relationship that includes a thriving student exchange program and continues to this day.