

Black Leader Discusses History and The Future

February 4, 2002

Section: B SECTION

Page: BM1

HOWARD M. UNGER howard.unger@heraldtribune.com

Just like it did 30 years ago, bad economics can unite people.

That was **Cynthia Newell's** theme Sunday as she spoke to about 90 people at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, recounting her Bradenton childhood and her thoughts on moving back 27 years after she vowed never to do so. **Newell** broke that promise when she returned in 1996. Three years later, she founded the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative, a grassroots organization that educates and empowers minorities. During the nearly three decades she was away, **Newell** attended colleges in Atlanta and Connecticut and participated in the civil rights movement. "When I returned, I noticed that in spite of the things that kept us apart, there were so many things that could have kept us together," she said.

Newell talked about her days at Southeast High School during the late '60s, when blacks weren't the only students who faced discrimination.

While Manatee High was filled with children of "affluence and influence," she said, Southeast had the sons and daughters of "white trash."

"Here was another group of people equally mistreated because of their rural upbringing," she said.

Through the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative, **Newell** is trying to get people to come together to learn about what they have in common, she said.

"I came back because I needed to heal the scars of racial discrimination," **Newell** said.

She found that the houses in her neighborhood still looked like they did in 1969, and, more importantly, the mindset of the community hadn't changed. Blacks, she said, were still being treated differently and doing little to change that.

"There's a great work to educate people to understand social and economic justice," **Newell** said. "Our world is a neighborhood and it is tied by destiny," she said. Every black person, she said, must realize what they can add to their community and, in a greater sense, the world around them.

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship member Rich Redfern, who introduced **Newell**, said **Newell's** discussion was something the mostly white crowd needed to hear.

"Whites really need to be shaken up every once in a while," Redfern said.

Redfern said **Newell's** speech was a reminder that whites like himself take for granted the economic injustices that exist. "Blacks can't do that," Redfern said.

Caption: STAFF PHOTO / MICHAEL DIEMER / mike.diemer@heraldtribune.com

In her talk at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, **Cynthia Newell** recounts her Bradenton childhood and thoughts about moving back.