

## Vigil draws more than 500

### Town looking to form racial-equity taskforce

By Brian Bushard

[bbushard@inkym.com](mailto:bbushard@inkym.com) A big step in the journey toward addressing racial inequity and finding social justice in any community, K'Sha Bloise believes, is recognizing the problem and examining your role in it.

"People need to look at themselves and really think, what can I be doing? It's not just about signing a petition or going to a protest," she said. "Those things are necessary, but nothing changes unless you look at yourself and think, am I part of the problem? Am I complicit?"

Bloise was one of the organizers of a protest and candlelight vigil Friday night that drew 500 people to Main Street. The gathering was held to commemorate the lives of 50 of the thousands of Black men and women who had been killed over the past decade at the hands of police officers nationwide.

It was organized by current and former Nantucket High School students, along with Unitarian Universalist Church Rev. Linda Simmons. Bloise, who graduated from Nantucket High School in 2017, called it a starting point in addressing racial inequity.

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Vigil: Peaceful protest draws 500

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SENIOR MOMENT: From left, Nantucket High School Class of 2020 members Lauren D'Aprix, Anna DeCarlo, Rosha Kelly and Celia Almodobar ride up Main Street in a Jeep during Saturday's graduation parade. The event followed the NCTV broadcast of the graduation ceremony, held individually for each senior Monday and Tuesday to ensure social-distancing guidelines. Many seniors and some spectators chose not to social-distance or wear masks during the parade, which lasted about an hour. For more photos, turn to page 4A and log on to [www.ack.net](http://www.ack.net).

Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger



Brianna Leveille speaks during Friday's racial-inequity protest and candlelight vigil on Main Street.

African Meeting House, the majority of ways in which people of color experience racism come in the form of

The first step is to show up and listen to people of color in your community, she said. The second is to educate yourself on the history of police brutality and systemic racism and how it affects Nantucket and the rest of the country today.

“Educate yourself,” Bloise said. “A lot of the burden is put on people of color to educate everyone else, especially here because we’re so underrepresented in positions of power.”

But the issue goes beyond education alone, she said.

Britney Anderson, who coorganized the vigil, as well as the protest earlier this month at Tom Nevers Field, said it’s a matter of hiring more people of color to positions of power within the town, such as in the school system, town government and on the police force.

She pointed out the majority of town government, school system and police force is white, and does not come close to adequately representing the diversity of the island’s population. “Other than putting Black people in positions of power, the white people that are already in those positions need to be empathetic and try their best to listen and understand,” Anderson said.

“Black lives matter. Not just, I’m at the protest so Black lives matter right now and then still do racist things.”

The Select Board is looking into creating a taskforce comprised of town officials and community members alike to address issues of racial inequity on the island.

Board member Jason Bridges said the town needs to be more communicative with people of color in order to better listen and understand how racial inequity affects them on the island. It could start with being more transparent with any updates on the continuing investigation into the March 2018 vandalism of the African Meeting House, in which the words “N---r Leave” were spraypainted on the front of the building, he said. No arrests have been made.

“The reality is your Select Board has failed you and we all know it,” Bridges said. “We failed to acknowledge the severity of the pain resulting from the racist defaming and race crime of the African Meeting House. We failed to provide opportunities for our community to voice their concerns and frustrations.”

Protest co-organizer Liela Marrett said that unlike the overt racism of the graffiti at the

what are called micro-aggressions, and can be harder to see.

It’s as basic as the glare people give to people of color walking down the street, she said.

In her speech Friday, Bloise added they’re the implicit biases against Black people, even from people who would not consider themselves racist.

“If you’re wondering when this is going to end, you’re part of the problem,” Bloise said. “If you’re inconvenienced by this, you’re part of the problem. Ask yourself why you’re uncomfortable with people saying ‘Black lives matter.’ They’re not saying that they matter more, just that they matter too. For us it doesn’t end. We’re still going to have to live through these things.”

Bloise, Marrett, Anderson and several other students are planning additional actions throughout the summer.

Simmons agreed with Bloise. As a white minister, she said white people need to start listening to people of color, and ask what it means to be a Black person living in this country.

Addressing racial inequity takes education, she said. It takes hiring practices that account for the diversity of the island. It starts with going to vigils and protests and hearing from Black people, she said.

“This has been happening for a long time and it’s so endemic in how we talk and see each other,” Simmons said. “We keep reading and educating ourselves and we know it’s not enough. Then we say there should be more people of color in this system. Just because you put a Black person in the room does not mean you’ve completed your work.”



Harvard professor Khalil Abdor-Rashid speaks on Main Street Monday during a candlelight vigil and peaceful protest attended by more than 500 people.

Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger