

E-NEWS

a project of the working group



Photo credit: Jackson Hill.

"Just one tiny candle we lit."

That's what Gary Svee says in the PBS documentary **Not In Our Town** as he recalls what happened one holiday season in Billings, Montana. Svee worked at the local paper when white supremacists threw a cinderblock through the window of a Jewish family's home. With his help, the Billings Gazette printed a full-page menorah for readers to display in their windows, and that December, 10,000 people put up paper menorahs to show they wouldn't allow hatred in their community. **The candle they lit in Billings sparked a national movement.**

[Watch a clip about Billings from Not In Our Town](#)



The Billings delegates at the NIOT Gathering. Row 1: Eran Thompson, Tina Holds The Enemy, Randy Siemers. 2: Margaret MacDonald, Jan Siemers. 3: Gary Svee, Wayne Inman, and Chuck Tooley.

[The First-Ever Not In Our Town National Gathering](#)

Over a decade after the Billings story was shared with the nation, the movement to fight hate and build inclusive communities is alive and well in towns across America. Just two months ago, anti-hate organizers from 25 communities converged in Bloomington, Illinois to meet each other for the first time.

"This was a very significant event, and I felt privileged to be a part of it," said Paul Sheridan, a civil rights attorney and member of the West Virginia Hate Crimes Task Force. "The people who came were the folks who understand best the power of the **Not In Our Town** story, and who are recreating that story in various ways in their own communities. They are truly on the front lines in the struggle against intolerance."

For three days, the group shared stories about their towns and their work. They discussed the obstacles they faced, and they brainstormed new community-based solutions.

"We inspired each other to keep pressing on, even in the wake of major challenges," said Becki Cohn Vargas, a school administrator from Palo Alto, California. "We all had a very similar passion and mission to be upstanders for change and equity in our country."

In one of the most memorable images of the weekend, participants gathered on the steps of the county courthouse. Each person held a candle, and as a flame passed through the rows, the crowd grew quiet. When the photographer took the picture, they could hear the shutter snap. In the photo they took that day, you can see how far **Not In Our Town** has come. At the center you'll find Gary Svee,

holding up his candle alongside all the Billings citizens who first took a stand together--organizer Randy Siemers, former police Chief Wayne Inman, Margaret MacDonald and former mayor Chuck Tooley. This original group is encircled by over 100 others from around the country, all leaders in their own communities, and all of whom they inspired.

[More Love/ Less Hate in 2007](#) [Support Not In Our Town](#)

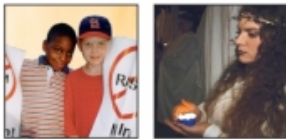
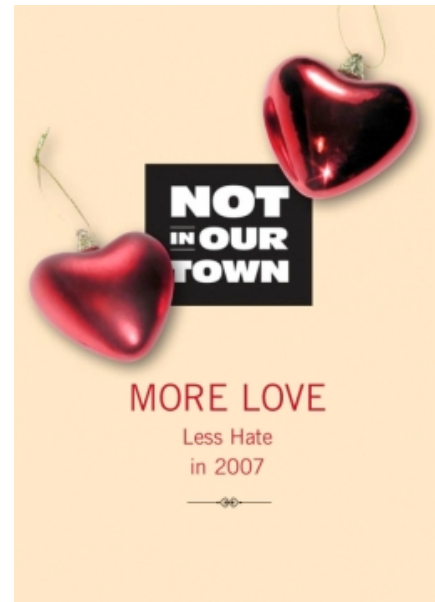
For over a decade, **Not In Our Town** has proven to be an enduring tool for communities fighting intolerance, but the movement needs your support.

This year, give the gift that sparks engagement by making a tax-deductible donation to **Not In Our Town**.

Your donation can help send a film crew to document anti-hate work in communities around the country; it can send resources to schools and civic groups; it can spread the word and expand the reach of **Not In Our Town**.

Communities fighting hate need our support.

Please make a tax-deductible donation that will help us find More Love/ Less Hate in 2007.



Looking Back: The Year in Review

2006 was a year of milestones. It marked the anniversary of **Not In Our Town**, and the occasion of the first NIOT Gathering. It was a time to celebrate accomplishments of the last 10 years, but it was also a time of emerging challenges that signaled the work ahead in the next decade.

As the nation grappled with divisive issues in an election year, **NIOT communities around the country tackled the challenge of intolerance head-on.**



Fort Collins, CO

When Fort Collins was struck by anti-Semitic vandalism, the police didn't classify the graffiti as hate activity until people in the neighborhood complained. NIOT Fort Collins leaders, who had just returned from the National Gathering, brought law enforcement officials together with city leaders and concerned citizens to talk about how to develop better response mechanisms. The group also called on the newspaper to take an active role in addressing intolerance in the town. Shortly afterwards, the newspaper published an editorial titled, "It Takes A Community to Refute Hate."



Madera, CA

When an African American student faced racist remarks from her teacher, her family decided to take action. Then shortly after this incident another teacher in the area was revealed to be a white supremacist. To address the climate of racism in the schools and the community, a group lead by Gloria Brown and Michelle Alexander is building a growing coalition of law enforcement officials, local leaders, and faith groups. Plans for a youth summit are underway.

Olympia, WA

Just months after neo Nazi group the National Socialist Movement started a violent riot in Ohio, the people of Olympia discovered the same organization was planning a white power rally on the steps of the Washington State Capitol. Working with a broad coalition of faith groups, government leaders, law enforcement and citizens, Olympians organized a completely peaceful response that showed neo Nazis weren't welcome and the community is united by and for diversity.

Fremont, CA

Alia Ansari, a young Afghan American mother, was walking near a school with her two-year-old daughter when she was shot to death. Police in Fremont have not charged a suspect or classified the killing as a hate crime. But in the Bay Area suburb of Fremont, home to the nation's largest Afghan community and one of the most diverse cities in America, there is fear that Ansari was targeted because she was Muslim and wore the veil or hijab. In the aftermath of this crime, there have been a series of events to affirm that hate has no home in Fremont. On January 11, the Fremont Alliance for a Hate-Free community will hold a panel and screening of NIOT at an event called "Our Community--We All Belong." The forum will encourage city leaders, local law enforcement and school leaders to develop a plan with community members and faith based groups to address safety and bias issues in Fremont.

Manassas, VA

When a Mexican day laborer was robbed and murdered in what police called a hate crime, residents of Manassas struggled to come to terms with the brutal killing. Unity in the Community, a local group that has been active for ten years, called on a coalition of churches, as well as police, to understand how the murder had happened in Manassas, and to try to make the community safer for immigrants.

Palo Alto, CA

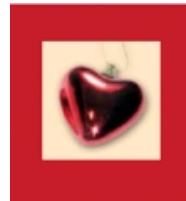
A recent study reports that 90 percent of LGBT middle and high school students say they have been harassed or assaulted in the past year. In an effort to make schools safer for all students, Palo Alto Unified School District embarked on a month-long NIOT campaign. Students throughout the district attended screenings of **Not In Our Town** and participated in activities about overcoming stereotyping and intolerance.

Bloomington, Illinois

Bloomington, Illinois became the first official NIOT city in 1996 with city limits signs that proclaim, "No Racism, Not in Our Town." This year, The NIOT group in the twin cities of Bloomington and Normal celebrated its 10-year anniversary with a march and rally. The headline in the local paper, The Pantagraph, read "Still Strong: After 10 Years, Not In Our Town Campaign Shows It Has Staying Power."

Happy Holidays!

Here's wishing you peace and joy in the new year
and hoping for more love/ less hate in 2007



From all of us at Not In Our Town and The Working Group

The Working Group
PO Box 70232 | Oakland, CA 94612-0232 | Ph: 510.268.9675 Fax: 510.268.3606 www.theworkinggroup.org | info@theworkinggroup.org

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