



Human Rights Commission

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Owatonna Human Rights Commission Planning Welcoming Week Events *September 19 mural dedication kicks off events*

OWATONNA, Sept. 2, 2022 – The Owatonna Human Rights Commission is planning events to celebrate Welcoming Week September 19 through 23.

The events are being planned under the theme of *Where We Belong* initiated by Welcoming America, a nonprofit organization leading a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by ensuring everyone belongs. “Welcoming Week is a way for the Owatonna Human Rights Commission to bring together neighbors of all backgrounds to build strong connections and affirm the importance of creating welcoming and inclusive places in the community,” said Ethan Cords, Human Rights Commission Chairperson.

The Owatonna Human Rights Commission will host Welcoming Week events as follows. In addition, throughout the month of September, the Steele County History Center has an exhibit portraying immigration in Owatonna.

Monday, September 19 at 4:30 p.m.

Dedication of the new mural on the concrete panels along the City Parks Trail near Hoffman Drive NW and West Rose Street. The mural’s design promotes and reflects Owatonna’s rich cultural diversity. Following the dedication will be a Welcome Walk and exhibitor fair featuring local businesses and nonprofit organizations along Walnut Avenue from the mural site and ending at Bridge Street. Food trucks will be on site by Casper's Friendly Food Trailer and El Rey Del Taco with various options available to purchase. Mineral Springs Brewery will be open.

Tuesday, September 20 at 6:30 p.m.

Roundtable discussion at the Steele County History Center regarding language barriers in the workplace with the following participants: SEMCAC, Owatonna Public Utilities, Mayo Clinic Health Systems, Community Education, Allina, Health Finders, Mn Prairie County Alliance, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Sperion, Metroplains Management, Owatonna Public Library, Lakeside, and Viracon. Co-hosted by the Austin Human Rights Commission.

Thursday, September 22nd from 8:15 a.m. until 4:15 p.m.

Judge Karen Duncan presents *Promoting Peace 2022 - The Intersection of Race, Justice and Peace*. The presentation is designed so participants may attend all day or part of the day. Free tickets are available on [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com). Trinity Lutheran Church, 609 Lincoln Avenue, will host this non-denominational event.

Thursday, September 22 at 6:30 p.m.

When Home Won't Let You Stay, a poignant traveling photography exhibition and community conversation series about refugees in America by St. Paul, MN-based documentary artist James A. Bowey at the Owatonna Public Library. It provides a new perspective on the often-hidden lives and compelling experiences of refugees in American communities. The number of globally displaced people has risen dramatically in recent years and is expected to continue to rise. The traveling exhibition consists of contemporary color portraits accompanied by first-person stories highlighting the plight and resiliency of refugees working to make a new home in this country. James A. Bowey is a documentary artist who explores issues of human rights and social connection. He has spent his career covering a wide range of global and national stories. His photography and writing have been featured in *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, the *Associated Press*, as well as in numerous exhibitions. Bowey is also an educator and researcher focused on designing media and interactions to bridge social division.

"We hope to have a good turnout for these first annual events," Cords continued, "Please join us as we help Owatonna celebrate and welcome its residents from around the world by bringing neighbors together to ensure we all belong and thrive, no matter where we've come from."

Welcoming Week is part of Owatonna's participation in the [Rural Welcoming Initiative](#) sponsored by the national nonprofit [Welcoming America](#). Welcoming America is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that leads a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by ensuring everyone belongs. Welcoming Week is an annual campaign and celebration to showcase the movement of communities striving to be more welcoming places for all, including immigrants. Launched in 2012 by Welcoming America and its members, Welcoming Week provides individuals and communities the opportunity to proclaim welcoming values through events and local initiatives that foster mutual understanding between immigrants and non-immigrants, as well as deeper belonging for all.

Outside costs associated with the mural are being covered, in part, by a Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment grant through the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts & cultural heritage fund.

For additional information, visit Owatonna.gov and search for Human Rights Commission or contact one of the following Human Rights Commissioners:

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