

Large Crowd Gathers to Stop Asian American Pacific Islander Hate

By Abby Luby

The voices of young people were heard loud and clear on Sunday at the Westchester Against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Hate rally in Pleasantville.

A diverse crowd of roughly 200 people attended the rally, listening to speakers share their experiences as targets of racial bias. Under overcast skies and mild temperatures, many held signs protesting anti-Asian hate and bigotry.

Repeated attacks on Asian Americans throughout the country since the start of the pandemic has prompted several rallies in Westchester. Last month, an 83-year-old Korean woman in White Plains was punched in the face and knocked down.

The event was co-organized by Raghav Joshi, a junior at Blind Brook High School in Rye Brook, and Liv Bespolka, a local community organizer. Joshi spoke of walking with a friend at night in Rye Brook hearing racist names called out by high school students in a car.

"No community has been spared. We have to work towards building a better community," he said.

Pleasantville High School student Angelie Wallace gave a fiery speech about complacency.



ABBY LUBY PHOTOS



Several of the close to 200 people who attended the Westchester Against AAPI Hate rally in Pleasantville on Sunday.

Left: Sen. Chuck Schumer made a surprise visit to Sunday's rally denouncing hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

"Our negligence is our enemy. Asian lives are not your Twitter trend or your pawn for power," Wallace said.

Pleasantville Village Trustee David Vinjamuri, with his two young children at his side, told of his father coming to the United States from India in 1955. Vinjamuri denounced xenophobia experienced by many immigrants but praised the strength of immigration in this country.

"America has attracted the best

and the brightest to the United States and those who work the hardest," he said.

U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer made a surprise appearance wearing a mask that said #StopAsianHate. Schumer decried the spiraling incidents of racism over the last four years.

"As a result, we've seen too many people exhibit hatred and bigotry to Asians and other people as well," he said. "Hatred turns to violence."

Schumer said the new COVID-19

Hate Crimes Act, expected to pass this week, will see comprehensive reporting of bias crimes related to the pandemic.

"With this law, those who commit this kind of hate violence will be prosecuted," Schumer said.

Demeaning verbal harassment can come from those who don't know any better, said 16-year-old Archana Kumaran.

"Ignorance breeds hate and these values actively educates us what is wrong," she said.

Amina Fayaz, a Pleasantville High School junior, said bias can be more nuanced but just as cruel.

"It's the small things like when the teacher mispronounces your name or confuses you with the other Asian girl in the class," she said. "Even though I was born and raised in this country, I've been asked where I'm from. These are all micro-aggressions."

Praising the efforts of the students was Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-Cold Spring). Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-White Plains) also participated.

Jones pointed to the nation's rise in white supremacy as being a root cause of the wave of anti-Asian behavior. He called on schools to do more to teach about the history of America's diverse AAPI community.

Anti-Asian sentiment has presented itself in other forms. The pandemic has seen many Asian-owned businesses lose patrons, a point stressed by Bill Kuang, co-vice president at the Office of Chinese Americans Westchester and Hudson Valley. Kuang said some businesses have seen a 70 to 80 percent drop in revenue since the start of the pandemic.

Lilian Wu, a known emeritus research scientist at IBM and a Taiwanese immigrant serving on Westchester County's Asian American Advisory Board who attended the event, said she has concerns about the lack of Asian American women in science and technology professions.

"The narrative on Asian women is that we are quiet and good listeners but we don't make good leaders," Wu said. "That narrative has to be changed."

Helping Joshi organize the rally was his close friend, Matt Weinstock, 18. He has helped Joshi organize Black Lives Matter rallies.

"We are focusing on getting the anti-Asian sentiment message out to politicians and legislators," Weinstock said. "It's depressing to live in this country where racism is still so prevalent."

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