

# THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

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## CELEBRATIONS

### Success Story

Congratulations to **Karlie Thornton**, a 2015 Hazelwood West High graduate, who is making waves in the Chicago arts community as a graphic artist, design curator and photographer. Karlie recently modeled for a Nissan ad campaign and also had her photography featured in *Sophisticated Living* magazine.



<http://www.stlamerican.com/edition>

St. Louis American  
St. Louis City County  
St. Louis, MO  
Circulation: 70,200  
Frequency: Weekly  
December 20, 2018

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## NCCU launches 4<sup>th</sup> annual Summons of Joy Program

Police give gift certificates, rather than tickets, to those with financial need

By Rance Thomas  
For The St. Louis American

North County Churches Uniting for Racial Harmony and Justice's Summons of Joy Program recently kicked off its fourth year.

The program involves some North County Churches Uniting for Racial Harmony and Justice's (NCCU) members in Florissant donating funds to NCCU during the Christmas season, which NCCU uses to buy gift certificates. These certificates are then given to the Florissant Police Department to give to individuals they stop during the Christmas season for minor violations. They give the certificates, rather than tickets, to those who appear to have a financial need. NCCU churches have donated more than \$27,000 to support this program.

This program was implemented as part of an effort to improve relations between the police and the community in North St. Louis County. After the Michael Brown police killing and resulting unrest in Ferguson, NCCU held a number of community forums in North County and brought together mayors, police, pastors, and community leaders throughout North County in an effort to help calm the situation. Members of the Alton



Police Department and Madison County Sheriff's Office participated. The Alton Police Department still participates and has even implemented a similar program but on a smaller scale.

After a number of meetings, NCCU formed a Discussion and Solutions Committee to explore ways to calm local communities and improve relations between the police and the community. This committee consists of representatives from four police departments – Florissant, Hazelwood, Clayton, and Alton – and the St. Louis County Police Department's North Precinct, three pastors, the superintendent and director of Communications of the Hazelwood School District, a representative of the Ferguson-

Florissant School District, and several community leaders. The committee has been working to bring the churches, schools, and community together around positive activities since 2014. It has brought several mediation and reconciliation groups to assist.

Based on this work, several police departments increased their diversity, attended more community events, visited some local churches, organized athletic leagues for youth, implemented "coffee with cops" programs, participated in school activities and began to communicate with citizens in times other than times of trouble. Several departments have had their officers undergo police-community relations

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One committee member, Rev. John Higgins, pastor of John Knox Presbyterian Church in Florissant, mentioned program similar to Summons of Joy in Kansas City that helped to improve relations between police and the community, and NCCU adopted it. The program has received a warm reception from individuals who received gift certificates and the community generally. Police officers love the program, because they say they have never received so much positive response from the community.

This program is spreading to other parts of the country as well. Of course there is still work to be done, but we have been very pleased with our progress.

*Rance Thomas is cofounder and president of North County Churches Uniting for Racial Harmony and Justice (NCCU) – which includes 26 churches of various denomination, including seven Catholic churches – and professor emeritus of Criminal Justice/Sociology.*

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