

Community day fosters racial healing in the Historic Triangle

By Willie Thompson
Correspondent

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Heal Greater Williamsburg, Heal the Nation Community Day in James City County on Oct. 22, 2022, included community discussions on local history, mental health, parenting and tools to have civil conversations about race. Courtesy of the Virginia Racial Healing Institute (Virginia Racial Healing Institute)

JAMES CITY — Dozens of people turned out Saturday to mark the third annual Heal Greater Williamsburg, Heal the Nation Community Day.

The event took place on the lawn of the Amblers House at Jamestown Beach Event Park. The Amblers House is a 19th century home listed on the

National Register of Historic Places and is [being restored by James City County](#).

The event started in 2020 as a Williamsburg rally to bring local leaders together to discuss what their organizations were doing to facilitate racial healing during a climate of national social unrest, according to Laura Hill, founder and director of Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle.

Hill said she was inspired to begin the local chapter of the organization after former Gov. Ralph Northam proclaimed 2019 a year of reconciliation.

“He encouraged people to work toward racial reconciliation and healing,” Hill said.



Laura Hill, founder and director of Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle, and Will Hairston, co-founder of Coming to the Table-National and a founding board member of the Virginia Racial Healing Institute, at the Heal Greater Williamsburg, Heal the Nation Community Day on Saturday, Oct. 22. Courtesy of Will Hairston

Since the first rally, the format and location of the event have changed to be more interactive, educational, family oriented and reflective of Coming to the Table's commitment to serve the entire Historic Triangle region, Hill said.

On Saturday, the event was set up for people of all ages and offered something for everyone to enjoy. The event included arts and crafts, rock painting for the Rock Garden at Freedom Park and storytelling.

[Professional storyteller Dylan Pritchett](#) told stories of healing as well as personal stories “about differences and about how people resolve differences,” he said. Pritchett has been telling “Freedom Stories” for the James City County Parks and Recreation department since 2014, although this year's event was canceled because of Hurricane Ian.

First-timers who attended the day's events said that they had never experienced anything like it.

“This event is about racial healing, but uniquely, it's not just Black people who are attending this event; there are also white people here, and to me, that signals that everyone here is ready to face the full truth,” Maia Wilson said. “Black people were exploited and harmed and would lose their lives at the hand of white people, but you see some here today to say ‘I recognize that that's what happened’ and that my history is intertwined with yours in a way that is impactful to the future.”



John McGlennon, chairman of the James City County Board of Supervisors, read a proclamation at Heal Greater Williamsburg, Heal the Nation Community Day on Saturday, Oct. 22. Courtesy of Tilford Bartman

The afternoon also featured community discussions that focused on local history, mental health, parenting and tools to have civil conversations about race, as well as a number of vendors, including those who shared history with the crowd.

“These events are really important to us to get our story out,” said Dwayne Scheid, an archeologist for the National Park Service. “Park services traditionally told a very sort of narrow view of history, and so for the last four or five years, the parks have really pushed the idea of telling those untold stories.”

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