

## NEWS

# UNITED AGAINST HATE: At Lowell rally, sharing message of tolerance, hope (SLIDESHOW)



By **RICK SOBEY** | Boston Herald

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LOWELL — Michelle Vlamis has never been fearful as a Jew living in America.

Growing up, she truly believed that the hatred was in the past, and Jewish people were safe here.

But Vlamis no longer feels as secure, especially after recent events, including last weekend's gathering of neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klan members in Charlottesville, Va. — in which a white supremacist allegedly drove a car into a group of counter-protesters, killing one and injuring many others.

“Last week really made things so much more imperative and scary,” said Vlamis, the president of Lowell's Reform Jewish congregation, Temple Emanuel of the Merrimack Valley.

“There has been a real outpouring of hate recently in this country, and it really saddens me,” she added.

As a result, Vlamis and others stood together in downtown Lowell Friday evening — a “Standout Against Hate” rally in wake of last weekend in Charlottesville.

About 50 residents held signs, sang “This Land Is Your Land” and flashed peace signs at the busy intersection in front of City Hall and the Police Department. Many drivers honked their horns and waved in support of the rally.

It was organized by Solidarity Lowell, a coalition of community members who stand together against hate and discrimination.

“All communities are struggling with racism and other issues,” said Lynne Lupien, of Solidarity Lowell. “And people need to know they can be safe in their communities.

“We need politicians who don’t embrace white supremacy. I’m freaked out I’m saying this in 2017,” added Lupien, holding a “Hate Has No Home Here” sign. The phrase on her sign was written in six languages — English, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, Arabic and Khmer.

Other signs at the rally included “Stand Against Racism,” “Resist Trump’s Hateful Agenda,” and “Love > Hate.”

“There are people out here making it known we will not put up with it, and we care,” said Lowell resident Catherine Polgreen.

Lowell teacher Laura Lamarre Anderson was holding a “Words Matter” sign at the rally.

She said that children are receiving the wrong message this summer.

“We spend a lot of time teaching in school how to get along and tolerate differences, and I think right now during summer break they’re learning quite the opposite lesson,” said Anderson, a Westford resident. “So we need to show them that’s not normal. That’s the outlier.”

Coleman Rogers said that Lowell is an accepting community with a lot of cultures, but he pointed out that the Southern Poverty Law Center lists a neo-Nazi Daily Stormer chapter in Lowell.

“It’s sad to think there’s a group here,” Rogers said.

Last weekend, Heather Heyer died in Charlottesville when a car rammed into a crowd of people protesting the white nationalist rally.

Counter-protesters had converged for a march along a downtown street when suddenly a Dodge Challenger barreled into them, hurling people into the air. Video shows the car reversing and hitting more people.

The Ohio man who police say was driving, 20-year-old James Alex Fields Jr., was described by a former high school teacher as an admirer of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. He was quickly taken into custody and has been charged with second-degree murder and other counts.

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.

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**2017 > August > 18**