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Leaders target Metro racial barriers

Business execs, social activists devise plans to unite city and suburbs at the New Detroit summit.

David Josar / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Regional leaders are in the midst of a three-day summit as they are trying to find a solution to the area's racial divide.

"We need to come up with plans that will once and for all break down these barriers that have separated our community," said Shirley Stancato, president of New Detroit, a nonprofit coalition of community, social and business leaders that spearheaded the conference. "If we come together, we can create something amazing."

The time for such a drive is now, Stancato said, citing the cooperation that was necessary to host the Super Bowl and the All-Star Game last summer.

About 250 of the area's executives and other personnel from key organizations met for the Leadership Summit on Race and brainstorming sessions Monday at the Marriott in downtown Detroit.

Stancato said participants will meet again in January to ensure the ideas are being implemented.

One problem, according to a United Way of Southeastern Michigan survey of 7,000 Metro Detroiters, is no elected official is viewed as someone who fairly represents all of the people of the region.

Kurt Metzger, director of research for the United Way, said that although the survey found clear-cut leaders for individual counties or cities, no one spanned different communities.

"One person whose name did come up was Roger Penske, but that probably had a lot to do with the Super Bowl," Metzger said. Penske headed the Super Bowl XL Host Committee and has since begun to take charge of several private initiatives aimed at keeping Detroit clean and safe.

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