

CHANGE

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Finding friends in the cause

Maddie Bogart and Niki Botzet both graduated from Alexandria Area High School in 2019. While friendly acquaintances, they wouldn't have considered themselves friends. That was until a march happened two weeks ago in Alexandria following Floyd's death.

Boggart is heading into her sophomore year at Concordia College in Moorhead. There she's enrolled in global studies courses and is an active member in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission. While Bogart is active in striving for change, she's relatively new to the game.

"I went through some tough times in middle school and the beginning of high school," Bogart said. "I think that helped me grow in my empathy for other people. I really appreciated it when people spoke up for me in my struggles, and it hurt when people stigmatized me in certain ways. My problems were different than people affected by racism, but it helped me show empathy to people who define themselves by their differences."

Bogart started a non-profit called Change in Motion, where they focus on educating and uplifting diverse cultures in Alexandria and Greater Minnesota. She reached out to Botzet, a black graduate from Alexandria Area High School in 2019, to be part of the movement.

Botzet joined Change in Motion's first peaceful march on June 3, before being asked to speak at the Time for Change event on Thursday. Botzet spoke about how she's compliment-

ed for her hair and skin but recognized that no white person would willingly choose to be black in America. Botzet's time on stage was a moment of empowerment for her.

"When I was in high school, I wasn't very outgoing. I never stood up for myself," she said. "There were always people that would go out of their way to make me feel bad about my culture and who I am. Through Change in Motion and what we are starting to do, I feel like I truly have a voice. I feel like I have so much to say, and having this voice is a new thing for me."

Botzet and Bogart are encouraging young people in Alexandria to use their voices and join them in their movement. Change in Motion is on social media platforms for more information.

Police stepping up

Capt. Scott Kent has worked in the Alexandria police force for 18 years. In 2017, he started an implicit bias training program where he was proactive in giving officers additional skills to be more well-rounded. On Thursday night, he represented what change of culture can look like in police departments around the country.

Kent reiterated famous speeches from civil rights movements over the last 150 years, including a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"The measure of a man isn't measured in the moment of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy," Kent said.

Kent recognized the growing distrust between communities and law enforcement.

"Up until this point we have seen a surge of support from the Alexandria community. We



Jared Rubado / Echo Press

Josette Ciceron speaks at the Time for Change event near Alexandria Technical and Community College on Thursday, June 11. She recounted how her 6-year-old son asked her if the police were going to kill him, too.

do not want to lose that support," Kent said. "The Alexandria police department wants to continue to build trust and be a part of this community. So many times law enforcement comes to the table to be heard. It's time that we listen."

Taylor sets a challenge

When Taylor took the stage, he joked about how Pastor Hans Dahl of Calvary Lutheran Church and he had much of the same material for their speech. Dahl spoke about how people need to feel the injustice happening in America before they can fix it. He led the crowd in a prayer before sharing his experiences growing up in a small town in North Dakota.

Taylor challenged the gatherers to continue to help long after the Time for Change event finished.

"I am humbled to be invited

to this, but if I can be transparent, I am pretty shocked," Taylor said to the crowd. "This is something that's been going on for years. It seems like every couple of years, people get excited and want to be called to action. My challenge for you is, are you here for the Facebook photo, or are you here to last? Are you here to endure?"

Taylor continued by thanking everybody who showed up on Thursday, before asking what they are going to do next. Showing up to listen is the easy part. Now, Taylor wants to make a difference when nobody is watching.

"The biggest thing is not to change your focus when the news cycle changes," Taylor said. "How do we stay focused on what happened and what transpired while paying attention to everything else going on around the world? It's about

not walking away when they see injustice happening. There's a great parable in the bible. Don't cross the road like everybody else. Be a good Samaritan and go straight to the problem."

A harrowing story

After Taylor relinquished the stage, one of the more emotional parts of the night followed in Josette Ciceron's time on the microphone.

Ciceron is a Haitian-American woman who has had some tough experiences in Alexandria. She told a story about how a white man and woman wouldn't board an elevator with her and her son. She talked about how her husband was falsely detained in front of her house as the officer had his hand on his gun. But what came next was a question that brought her to her knees.

As she was putting her son to bed a few nights ago, he looked at her and asked if the police were going to kill him, too. Ciceron wept as she wasn't sure what to say to her 6-year-old son.

"I stared into his little eyes searching for what to say," she said to the crowd. "His dad came over, sat on the side of the bed and said, 'Hey buddy, as long as you're here with us, you're always safe.'"

Ciceron's chilling story struck the crowd into stunned silence. After she got off the stage, they honored her with a standing ovation. It was a moment Ciceron won't soon forget.

"When I finished, it felt like a huge sense of relief, like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders," she said. "I wanted to be as open and as vulnerable as possible to give people an opportunity to empathize. To see the reaction I got when I was walking off that stage was so moving. It made me feel whole."

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