

THEY GROW UP SO FAST: June is a busy time for birds as they raise offspring. **P7**



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Not on a microphone, Matthew Ford shares his message with a cardboard sign.



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With a microphone and some tagboard, Tanisha DeRungs led the forum which she dubbed a "conversational event."



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Kanabec County Sheriff Brian Smith keeps a watchful eye at the periphery of the gathering. In response to threats made leading up to the event, a section of East Maple Avenue adjacent to the school was barricaded in order to subdue potential disruptions.

Residents of a small city take on a **BIG** conversation

BY KIRSTEN FAURIE
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Twenty-year-old Tanisha DeRungs has a message for the citizens of Mora: "It doesn't matter if you feel that you have no place in this conversation. You absolutely do."

A 2018 graduate of Mora High School, Tanisha has a message about the importance of participating in issues of race in the wake of George Floyd's death on May 25 and the subsequent protests and riots across the state, nation and world.

She brought that message to the Mora High School parking lot, adjacent to the Kanabec County Courthouse and Jail on Saturday, June 3, in a gathering she dubbed a "conversational event."

"It was a little stressful for me, trying to figure out how I can come across as someone who just wants to be heard, rather than someone who wants to bark at people because I've been hurt," she said.

In preparation for the event, Tanisha coordinated with leaders at Mora Public Schools, City of Mora and requested the help of Kanabec County Sheriff Brian Smith. Help, which Tanisha said, he delivered.

"(Brian Smith) really is an amazing man. A big reason I have so much faith in this town is because of the authority figures and what they have come together to accomplish for this very conversation. It has been nothing but love and I am so grateful."

TANISHA'S STORY

At the event, Tanisha shared her own story of what it was like to grow up as a black person, then encouraged those in attendance to share how they have been affected by issues of race and prejudice.

Tanisha grew up in St. Paul where there was "massive" diversity. She spent some time in foster care, until three years ago, Tanisha moved to Mora to live with her grandparents, Sue and Virgil Ericson. She began attending Mora High School as a junior.

One of the first things Tanisha noticed was that she stood out as someone who wasn't white.

According to the United States Census Bureau 2018 American Community Survey estimates, nearly all of Kanabec County's 16,000 residents are white.

The Kanabec County population's racial background is:

- 96.3% White alone
- 1.8% two or more races
- 0.8% American Indian and Alaska Native alone
- 0.5% Asian alone
- 0.3% Black or African American alone

By comparison, St. Paul is 56.7% white alone, with 16% black or African American alone, and 5% two or more races.

Tanisha said it was difficult being a black child of the foster care system in St. Paul. She got another chance and fresh start when she was able to move to Mora. "Coming here was everything to me," she said — but Tanisha described some of her experiences in high school as "not very pleasant."

"I spent the last two years of my high school career in this town, trying to talk myself into feeling



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Approximately 75-100 people attended a public forum about race and prejudice near the county courthouse on June 3.

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