

Get ready for Peace Day Philly

Many institutions have signed up to back nonviolence on Sept. 21.

THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Thursday, September 15, 2011

Doing anything Wednesday for the International Day of Peace?

Ever hear of it? Unless you're Quaker and for you every day is a day of peace, I bet not.

The United Nations established the concept in 1981, then pretty much ignored it until a British filmmaker started asking world leaders why no one was promoting 24 hours of annual nonviolence.

Jeremy Gilley spent four years tilting at windmills — "I thought this fellow was either a fool or a visionary," said one U.N. official. "Tree hugger," mused another. But



Daniel Rubin

by 2001, the pony-tailed former child actor had pushed the organization into passing a resolution setting each Sept. 21 as the day.

Gilley's bad fortune was scheduling the big announcement for the morning of 9/11. The attacks scuttled the news conference. But Gilley was nothing if not determined.

The movie he made about his quest, called *The Day After Peace*, documents how he pleaded, shamed, cajoled and begged, and how with the aid of celebrities (Jude Law, Angelina Jolie) and corporations (Coca-Cola, Skype, Adidas, Puma) he got results, such as an agreement from the Taliban to stop fighting long enough for 1.4 million Afghan children to be vaccinated against polio.

Lisa Parker watched the movie in the spring of 2009 at home in Stratford, where she cares for her 5-year-

See **PEACE** on B7

PEACE from B1

old son. She's a former social worker who has spent most of her career helping settle immigrants from Southeast Asia.

Gilley's movie gave her confidence to act. Just before Peace Day two years ago, she attended a Wayne street fair dressed as a giant white dove, a costume made from trash bags.

"Everybody was kind of staring at me," said Parker, 47. She'd tell the curious about the forthcoming day of peace. "Generally, people were interested, and some thought I was kooky. Luckily, my son was too young to be embarrassed."

She spent the next few months trying to coax organizations to honor the day, and was welcomed at Germantown Friends School, which she attended before studying at the Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts. GFS agreed to host soccer games for a group of local schools and the Police Athletic League's afternoon program. Two theaters

screened Gilley's film. That was it for 2010.

This year Peace Day has broken out across Philadelphia. More than 40 institutions have signed on. You can see what's scheduled at <http://www.una-gp.org/peace-dayphilly2011.htm>.

The success of Parker and her band of volunteers pays testament to perseverance, the power of a pure heart, and a touch of Arlene Ackerman fatigue. Hoping to get the Philadelphia School District on board, Parker went to a School Reform Commission meeting in July with fellow organizer Charlie Lumpkin, a retired teacher.

Supporters and opponents of the embattled ex-superintendent packed the hall, and when Lumpkin made a case for peace, audience members hooted. One commissioner asked if the peace people were working with anyone in the district. At the same time Parker said 'No,' a school official she'd never met jumped up and said 'Yes.'

"I guess with all of the Ack-

erman stuff, they were looking for some good news," Parker said. As soon one person said yes, others piled on.

Soon Parker could count on the police, the mayor, and a number of local universities to pitch in. Udi Bar-David, a cellist with the Philadelphia Orchestra, agreed to perform with his Intercultural Journeys program at the Ethical Society. Sharon Katz said she'd talk about her postapart- heid work with children in South Africa and run a music workshop at Parkway Northwest High School for Peace and Social Justice.

Peace Day activists are hoping for a worldwide truce this time next year. Could that work in Sudan? How about in Philadelphia, where last Sept. 21, police recorded 53 violent crimes?

So what are you doing for Peace Day?

Contact columnist Daniel Rubin at 215-854-5917, drubin@phillynews.com or @danielrubin on Twitter. Read his blog at philly.com/blinq.



CHARLES FOX / Staff Photographer
Peace Day Philly 2011 coordinator Lisa Parker (right) meets with two event volunteers, Charlie Lumpkin and Sharon Katz.