

'Peacemaker' merges Bahai Faith, work

Resolving conflict 'form of worship'

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A Reno resident has found a way to pair the principles of the Bahai Faith and his conflict resolution profession.

As founder and executive director of the Neighborhood Mediation Center in Reno in 2000, Trip Barthel said it was his faith that inspired him to go into the field later in life.

Now his work takes him worldwide and he is called a peacemaker.

"I guess this is an expression of a form of worship for me," he said.

Work through the mediation center has kept judges in Reno and Sparks from imposing monetary judgments. On a recent trip to India, the 54-year-old Barthel developed a curriculum on moral development and leadership that now is a required topic for all teachers enrolled at Shivaji University in Bombay.

Barthel said Judge Harold Albright championed using mediation in Reno Justice Court. Albright said he has seen positive results.

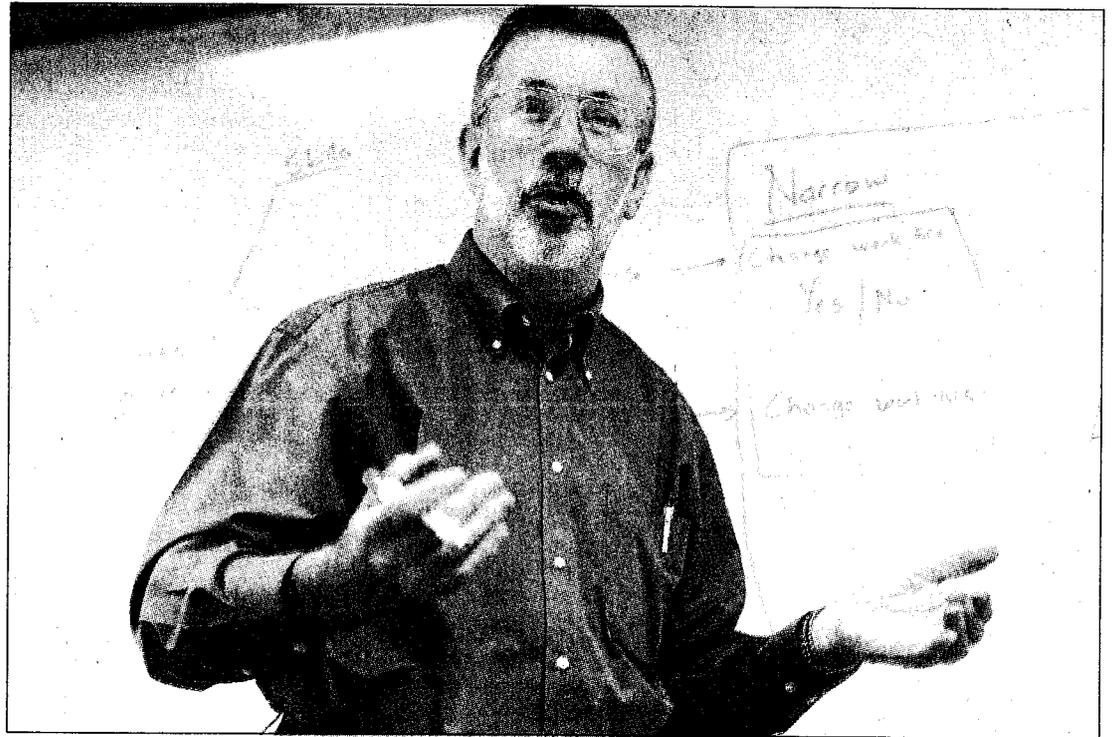
"So far it's worked slick," Albright said. "He's done a very good job and he's helped out. I'm really supportive."

The center has conducted more than 700 mediations with an 80 percent resolution rate, Barthel said.

"Most of what people want in this is not necessarily resolution," Barthel said. "They just want somebody to listen to them. They just want to be able to sit down. And that's not something they can do in court."

Unity of mankind is the fundamental tenet of the Bahai Faith, which Barthel said "plays a unique role in conflict resolution."

"I think the future in conflict



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Trip Barthel, director, Neighborhood Mediation Center, talks to a class on Dec. 8 at Truckee Meadows Community College. Many call him a peacemaker because of his role as a mediator. It's a career he chose late in life because of his Bahai Faith.

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■ Conflict mediator

resolution is moving toward a Bahai type of model," he said. "The Bahais say there are certain spiritual principles, which some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem."

Those principles are unity in diversity, equity and justice, equality of the sexes, trustworthiness and moral leadership, and in-

dependent investigation of truth.

Barthel said what blocks a person is that they are too focused — whether on themselves, their friends, community or nation.

"So when they really open up and realize that all around the world we're one people that changes kind of the starting point," Barthel said.

In mediation, Barthel said the parties have the opportunity to really hear one another. Their next opportunity is to see if there is a way to look at the case from a wider point of view.

"Mediation is all about broadening the perspective," Barthel said.

The difference between peacemaker and peace advocate is controversial in the field of mediation, he said. "We believe, I guess you could say, that both parties are right and both parties are wrong," he said. "If we choose one side of the table, then we are no longer able to help parties work together.

So it's a challenge."

The Rev. Noel Tiano, director of Nevada Center for Ethics and Health Policy at the University of Nevada, Reno, said he has been "enriched" by the conflict resolution training Barthel offers. Barthel teaches courses through UNR's Extended Studies program, which Tiano said he has taken.

"I think he has a wonderful message about peacemaking, conflict resolution, mediating," Tiano said. "And I believe the Bahai Faith embodies that openness and respect for various traditions as well as allowing one to be a practitioner in that context of a freedom and autonomous manner."

He said he also learned the facts about mediation.

"Mediation in and of itself is not one size fits all and not every problem can be solved," he said. "Some of the conflicts would remain as conflicts."