



RURAL DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP NETWORK

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SHIRLEY SHERROD AND MEREDITH McGEE AT CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

Leading voices in the movement for equality and social justice—from the 1960s and present day—will take center stage at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina, on Thursday, October 31, 2013 at 7:30 pm. The event, presented by the Rural Development Leadership Network (RDLN) in partnership with the Museum, will feature Shirley Sherrod, an organizer and community development worker based in Albany, Georgia, and Meredith McGee of Jackson, Mississippi, niece of James Meredith, who integrated the University of Mississippi in 1963. The speakers will read excerpts from their books, engage in dialogue with the audience, and sign copies for those in attendance. The event is free and open to the public.

Ms. Sherrod's memoir, *The Courage to Hope*, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2012. Ms. McGee's biography of her uncle, *James Meredith: Warrior and the America that Created Him*, was published by Praeger this year. Ms. McGee is also co-author of *Married to Sin*, a narrative of one family's secrets, redemption, and personal achievement, and author of *Odyssey*, a new book of poems and other writings, published by Meredith Etc, a company she started. Both women are graduates of the Rural Development Leadership Network's field project and study program, through which they spearheaded field projects in their communities and earned master's degrees *via* RDLN's innovative arrangement with Antioch University Midwest. Moreover, Ms. Sherrod also serves a member of RDLN's Board of Directors. RDLN, a national, multicultural social change organization, based in New York, is currently holding a National Network Assembly at Camp Caraway in Sophia.

Starry Krueger, president of RDLN, has commented, "We are proud to present this event in cooperation with the Museum because of our shared commitment to social justice for all people." Bamidele Demerson, executive director of the Museum said, "We are delighted to host this program, which relates so strongly with our mission." The International Civil Rights Center & Museum—a historic landmark, exhibiting and collecting institution, and educational service organization—promotes an understanding of the quest for equality, justice and freedom in the United States and across the world.

Sherrod gained national attention in July 2011 when she was forced to resign as Georgia Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A detractor circulated a video clip purportedly

showing Sherrod recounting that she had treated a white farm family with racial bias, when in fact she had worked diligently to save this family's farm. After receiving apologies from the Secretary of Agriculture and the President of the United States, Sherrod is back on the ground helping poor communities in Georgia with economic development and leadership development projects. Her husband, the civil rights leader Rev. Charles Sherrod, was the first Field Secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Albany, Georgia. Along with others, they established New Communities, which eventually received an award of more than twelve million dollars as part of the Minority Farmers lawsuit. The group used part of the money to purchase a former plantation that operated on the labor of an enslaved work force. This site will function as a hub for work in the sphere of racial healing. It will also serve as a training center and demonstration farm to preserve and revitalize African American agriculture in one of the poorest parts of Georgia.

RDLN was founded in 1983. Participants from eleven states are gathered at the RDLN Assembly, whose theme is "Fifty Years Later We Still Have Dreams!" Shirley McClain of Holly Springs, RDLN Issues Coordinator and former executive director of the North Carolina Hunger Network, is one of the Assembly's North Carolina hosts. Other RDLN Leaders in the state include: Theresa Isley of Siler City who works with the Family Violence & Rape Crisis Services; Evelyn Conley, a member of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, currently living in Sylva with her husband Robert Conley, author of *The Cherokee Nation* and many novels set in Indian country; and Martha Beatty of Raeford, executive director of Community Outreach Advocate.

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum opened its doors in 2010. The core experience of the Museum is *The Battlegrounds*, an engaging 16-gallery journey through American civil rights history that includes audio-video narratives, photographs, artifacts, vintage newsreel footage, video reenactments, and interactive components that document the local 1960 F.W. Woolworth lunch counter sit-in protests against racial segregation and other efforts in the nonviolent struggle for social change.

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