



'White flight' fighter to speak at YorkCounts summit

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While fetching her newspaper 15 years ago, Lynn Cummings said, she noticed five for-sale signs had sprouted outside homes owned by white families. Nearby, a black family had just moved in.

"White flight" was prevalent then throughout Pennsauken, a suburban township of about 36,000 people outside Camden, N.J., said Cummings, who will be the featured speaker at YorkCounts' annual summit Friday.

But when it reached her neighborhood, the impact hit home.

"It was suddenly then very personal when it was that close," she said. "I just felt so sad. I was overwhelmed by sadness."

Cummings later co-founded Neighbors Empowering Pennsauken, a community group aimed at bringing together established white families and new or incoming minority families. Since then, Pennsauken has moved closer to "stable integration" of white- and minority-owned homes, though this year's census figures will make the ultimate case, she said.

Differences: Aside from a history of racial friction and proximity to big cities, York City and

Pennsauken share little socioeconomically.

The New Jersey suburb emerged in the mid-1900s following the post-war exodus from city life, while York traces its history to the 18th century. Though many white families left Pennsauken, an influx of black professionals sustained the township's finances; in York, declining homeownership has weakened the city's tax base.

But Cummings said some of the lessons she's learned in Pennsauken could apply here.

She

hasn't decided exactly what she'll tell people gathered at the YorkCounts summit, she said in an interview Thursday, but the speech will focus mostly on how to mobilize others.

Among the questions she said she'll tackle: "How can we reinvent our cities to make them thriving and desirable places for people to want to live? What am I going to do about that, and who am I going to do it with?"

'Imagine many': Dan Fink, YorkCounts' communications director, said Cummings' message lines up with the theme of the summit: "One person can make a difference -- imagine many."

Fink and YorkCounts Executive Director James DeBord discovered Cummings last summer during a screening of "New Metropolis," a two-

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part documentary series about struggling suburbs. Cummings is featured prominently in the project.

"She's an ordinary person who lives in a small town," Fink said. "She noticed that there was stuff going on that wasn't good. She felt like, 'OK, I don't know how to do it ... but I've got to do something.'"

A number of other topics will be on the table at the summit, including a planned study of police regionalization in the York metro area, the status of plans for the York Academy Regional Charter School and the Stay in School report helmed by YorkCounts and the United Way.

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Meeting

YorkCounts will hold its annual community summit from 9 a.m. to noon Friday at the Pullo Center at Penn State York. The event is free and open to the public. Pre-registration is requested. To register, e-mail your name and phone number to summit@yorkcounts.org or call 650-1450. For details, contact Dan Fink at dfink@yorkcounts.org or 650-1460.

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