

## UPF Earth Day Forum in Las Vegas

Leslie Rigney  
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**Las Vegas, NV** – On April 20, 2016, UPF Las Vegas held a Forum at the Las Vegas City Hall to celebrate “Earth Day”. The theme was entitled “The Role of Interfaith Millennials in Greening our City: Challenges and Opportunities”. More than twenty participants were present, including some youth.

After the welcoming remarks by Katherine Duncan, Chairwoman of UPF Las Vegas and Leslie Rigney, Executive Director of UPF Las Vegas, a prayer was offered by Jim Rigney, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited and everyone sang “God Bless America”. Afterwards, a short video introducing UPF was shown.

The panelists introduced themselves including their interest and expertise. Rick Van Diepen, an architect by training, has more recently been involved in the Green Housing Movement. He spoke about the value of trees in the city environment and how important it is to focus on energy related to housing, as it is responsible for 40% of energy use! He also spoke about how building design can affect quality of life, and the energy challenges of low income families. Rick is in favor of churches and the Interfaith community in educating about energy conservation and sustainability. Emiljun Rapada, the National Director of Youth UPF USA spoke about the soon-to-be launched Youth UPF and the importance of youth in becoming good stewards of the environment and contributions of many youth, as well as the challenges they face in being recognized by the ‘older’ community and the importance of bridging the generation gaps and working together to solve and address community issues. Lynn Lanier spoke as a scientist very concerned that we convert all energy use away from fossil fuels. He is concerned that the whole issue has become much politicized and doesn’t know what to do about that. Lynn is very encouraged by the progress of the recycling technology available as well as the ability to obtain energy from landfills. He is very much in favor of taking youth on field trips to learn about sustainability efforts in the community and agreed with Rick that youth need experiences with nature in the form of local parks and availability of hikes in the mountains. Ruby Waller, a community activist, spoke about the value of women’s leadership in sustainability. She spoke of many incentives being available to convert to solar and wind. Ruby also echoed the need to care for one another, as well as ‘Mother Earth’, and the value and opportunity of community gardens.

Katherine Duncan offered a series of questions for the panel to discuss. Comments and questions were also taken from the other participants. One suggestion was to offer sustainable efforts as community service. Some of the organizations mentioned that are active in sustainability efforts include: “Union of Concerned Scientists”, “the Solutions Project”, “Green Our Planet”, “Defending Our Future”

Three of the guest panelists were appointed Ambassadors for Peace. The youth present asked how they can be affiliated with Youth UPF. The forum concluded with lunch and much lively discussion among everyone present.