

Hate literature found on WWU campus among recent similar incidents in Bellingham

By Robert Mittendorf, June 5, 2020

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Western Washington University Police are investigating reports of hate literature on campus and residents of at least one Bellingham neighborhood have reported seeing leaflets that promote racist views.

“A number of stickers/posters of the white supremacist group Patriot Front were found early (Friday) affixed to light poles across Western’s main campus in Bellingham,” WWU spokesman Paul Cocke said in an email.

He said a University Police officer found the posters on light poles in Red Square, in front of Wilson Library, in front of the Communications Building, in Haskell Square and at other locations.

All the posters were removed, Cocke said.

“Western Washington University strongly condemns the white supremacist beliefs of the Patriot Front,” Cocke said. “Hate will not be tolerated in our community.”

Cocke said there’s been a surge in racist activity locally in the wake of protests and demonstrations around the nation that denounce repeated violence against black Americans — including the May 25 killing of George Floyd in police custody.

In addition to the racist literature, Cocke said there was a recent report of a man shouting racial epithets near the Buchanan Towers residence hall on campus.

MESSAGES OF INTIMIDATION

It’s not the first time that Patriot Front has used this tactic to spread its anti-immigrant and white supremacist messages in Whatcom County.

On social media, its members boast about their activities and show photographs of members with their faces covered or hidden.

Patriot Front messages have been seen in Lynden, Ferndale, Bellingham and other locations around Western Washington since the summer of 2019.

Websites of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League list the Patriot Front among active U.S. hate groups.

It formed as an offshoot of Vanguard America after the deadly 2017 white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, the Anti-Defamation League said.

Officials at the ADL in Seattle have told The Bellingham Herald that this anonymous distribution of literature isn't so much a recruiting tactic as it is an attempt to intimidate.

Miri Cypers, executive director of the Anti-Defamation League's Pacific Northwest region in Seattle, said racist organizations like Patriot Front often used coded or subdued language when they start to organize in a new area.

"They want to put something out to the public that seems innocuous," [Cypers told The Herald in August 2019](#). "When you dig deeper and become more educated, it's very apparent how racist and anti-Semitic they are."

HATE SPEECH IN LETTERED STREETS

Members of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood Association used Facebook last week to warn residents about hate speech leaflets found inside curbside lending libraries.

"Please keep an eye out for these," the association said. "Carefully remove and dispose of anything like this that you find, talk to your neighbors (from a safe distance), and keep doing your best to let everyone know that racism isn't welcome in our neighborhood now or ever again."

In addition, a racist message was left in immigrant couple's door recently, said Sirantos Fotopoulos of Bellingham.

"It was a business card, and it was placed in the door jamb of my parents' front door, Fotopoulos told The Herald.

"My brother shredded the card. He was disgusted by it," Fotopoulos said.

Fotopoulos said his parents immigrated to the U.S. after World War II from Greece, where they were part of the Nazi resistance.

University officials are on heightened alert for any more of these posters, which when found will be removed as soon as possible in accordance with university policy.

Community members who may see such postings are asked to call the customer service number of WWU Facilities Management at 360-650-3420; they will dispatch staff to remove the posters or stickers on campus property.