

Caldwell church hosts award-winning author

By **DEREK ALLEN**
STAFF WRITER

CALDWELL — A crowd of local residents packed into the Caldwell First Presbyterian Church to hear the Rev. David Billings, author of “Deep Denial: The Persistence of White Supremacy in U.S. History and Life,” speak frankly about systemic racism and racial bias on Sunday, May 6.

“We are in such deep denial about what this country has done in terms of race, and what we have benefited from it,” said Billings. “I ache for my grandchildren to be a part of a more equitable society. But it will take a lot of work.”

Billings, an ordained United Methodist minister, preached at the church’s Sunday services before speaking about his book. He also held a book signing and a short question and answer session with residents after his talk.

West Caldwell resident James Heinegg said he has read “Deep Denial,” and thought it was excellent. Heinegg is also the Caldwell-West Caldwell School District superintendent.

“We’ve been studying it in our church group. The history that he describes, it’s different from reading a history book because he ties it

>> RELATED VIDEO

Please see our video on Rev. David Billings at theprogressnj.com.

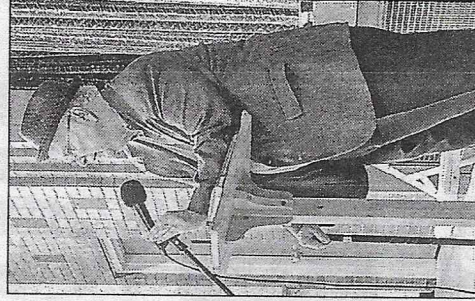
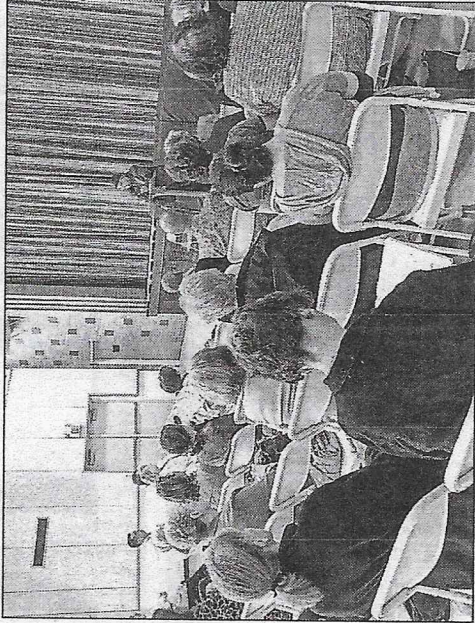
into the personal work that he has done,” he said. “Just learning about some of the systemic aspects of racism in the country has been very enlightening. We’ve been reading a few chapters at a time, getting together and discussing it.”

Heinegg said the subject was vitally important to learn about.

“This is a religious context to which we are discussing this, but this is much more than that. This is vital for our whole society to be aware of and learn about,” he said. “It’s fascinating, because we have been studying this book for several months, and then to have him preach in church and speak for us has been great.”

Through personal stories and popular history, “Deep Denial” documents the 400-year racialization of the United States. The book focuses on the notion of white supremacy and the need to organize together as a country for racial equity.

“Deep Denial,” published in 2016, won the Next Generation Indie Book Award in the social change category last year. The Indie Book



A crowd of local residents packed into the Caldwell First Presbyterian Church to hear Rev. David Billings, author of “Deep Denial: The Persistence of White Supremacy in U.S. History and Life,” speak frankly about systemic racism and racial bias on Sunday, May 6.

Awards is run by the Independent Book Publishing Professionals Group, a nonprofit collective of publishers, editors and writers dedicated to highlighting the work of independent authors.

Billings has also won numerous awards for his work with the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, an organization dedicated to training and organizing against racism.

Some of those awards include being named the National Association of Social Worker’s Public Citizen of the Year, along with the the New Orleans Pax Christi Bread and Ros-

“We have a lot of work to

by the church’s Facing Racism Task Force, in partnership with the Anti-Racism Alliance of Northern New Jersey, a multicultural organization dedicated to undoing structural racism.

Caldwell resident Deborah Donker said the church’s Facing Racism Task Force was borne out of a four week course circulated by the Presbyterian Church USA.

“A Curriculum was circulated to a lot of pastors in the region, and we opened it up to church members and invited them,” she said. “And then we thought, ‘Well gee, we should keep going with this.’ So now we meet once a month. We’ve been gradually reaching out to the community, and we decided to read David Billings’ book ‘Deep Denial.’ We’ve been doing a section at a time reading it, and it’s been great. We have reached out to other churches in the area, inviting members of their congregation too.”

According to the church’s website, the task force meets at 7 p.m. every fourth Monday of the month in the Heritage Gallery at the First Presbyterian Church in Caldwell. Their next meeting will be held on Monday, May 28.

For more information, visit firstprescaldwell.org.

do as a country,” said West Caldwell resident Marjorie Lucas. “I don’t want to say it’s impossible, but this is a serious problem. We need to work on it together. It’s pretty bad, and I do not think it is getting any better.”

Caldwell Council President Richard Hauser and Councilman Henderson Cole were also at the event.

“It makes you think,” said Cole. “Thinking everyday is the only way we will ever solve this problem. It’s got to be part of everyday life. I think his point is that as a white person you have a responsibility to be aware of these things.”

The event was organized