GREENSBORO, N.C. – The Greensboro Truth & Community Reconciliation Project (GTCRP) will swear in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first of its kind in the United States, at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, June 12, at The Depot, 236 E. Washington St.

U. S. Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C.), former Greensboro Mayor Carolyn Allen and District Court Judge Lawrence McSwain will officiate the historic public ceremony. The swearing-in is a milestone in the process designed to transform an ugly chapter in one city’s history into lessons upon which understanding, healing, forgiveness and true connections can be forged.

Modeled on truth-seeking efforts in South Africa, Peru and elsewhere, the Greensboro project hopes to become a model that other American communities can use to address unresolved injustice in their own histories. Initiated by survivors, the GTCRP has grown and is now being conducted by a task force of diverse residents who believe an unhealed wound is hurting the city’s human relations.

On Nov. 3, 1979, members of the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi Party killed five people and wounded ten others gathered in Greensboro for a march for racial, social and economic justice organized by the Worker’s Viewpoint Organization (later known as the Communist Worker’s Party).

Despite the fact that four TV crews captured the killings on film, the shooters were twice acquitted of any wrongdoing. In a third trial, a federal civil trial, Klansmen, Nazis and members of the Greensboro Police Department were found jointly liable for one of the deaths.

Although the City of Greensboro paid that $350,000 civil judgment on behalf of all three defendant groups, it has never apologized or publicly acknowledged any wrongdoing. Distrust and anger linger, simmering below the surface.

From more than 70 nominations, an independent panel representing a broad array of Greensboro’s social, religious and political sectors worked to select seven commissioners recognized for their integrity. Once seated, they will review documents and hear testimony to determine the truth, causes and consequences of what happened, produce a report, then suggest ways that both the individuals involved and the entire city can reconcile and heal.

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), an organization founded by the deputy chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is serving as a consultant to the GTCRP, as it has in similar efforts in nations including Peru, Colombia, Guatemala and Sierra Leone.

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