

Whites, Blacks Join to End Ferris Strife

MAY 22, 1969 Thursday

By DOUGLAS KIENITZ

BIG RAPIDS (AP) — Thousands of ribbons were passed out to college students and townfolk Thursday proclaiming:

"I've had it. Let's start living and working together — now."

It was a statement agreed upon by both Negro and white student leaders at Ferris State College Wednesday in a campaign begun Thursday to end the strife which caused police to break up a racial clash Tuesday morning.

The motto was printed on thousands of six-inch white ribbons for distribution through the business community of the 8,400-population town and to most of the 7,341 students on campus.

Leading the drive are Jerry Nielsen, 24, of Greenville, who became president of the all-college student government Wednesday, and Ron Snead, 25, of Grand Rapids, president of the NAACP student chapter.

Snead was one of the 13 students originally arrested, Tuesday, but he was ordered released.

The other 12 students were charged with unlawful assembly and released on \$200 bond each.

When Snead was exonerated Tuesday, he said "The whites can have this school."

But after the various campus meetings and the plans were formed to improve racial harmony, Snead said Wednesday:

"This has never been done before. I've already seen changes. I see interest among the students."

State Police joined sheriff's deputies and local police in breaking up a melee between Negro and white students at a dormitory parking lot. In a series of brick-throwings and scuffles, more than \$5,000 damage was done to dormitory furniture and windows.

In addition, several cars were damaged including one belonging to Snead.

It was the latest in a series of racial



—AP Wirephoto

Peacemakers Jerry Nielsen, Left, and Ron Snead

clashes on the campus. On March 3, State Police arrested more than 260 Negro students who staged a sit-in at the administration building.

Negro students in the past have said they have banded together because of threats from white students.

The black students, Snead said, want to improve race relations. He said if they see that Nielsen is sincere in the

attempt to overcome the problems, they will go along.

Snead, who became president of the NAACP chapter last month, said "We are also attempting to remove the image that Ferris is a backward college. It (the movement) will last as long as we can keep it going."

Nielsen and Snead said the harmony program includes the adoption of a

human relations committee composed of both black and white students at each dormitory to meet on a regular basis or whenever the need arises to solve any problem. There are no elected student officers at the dormitories at present.

It also includes a request that two Grand Rapids lawyers unite in their efforts to represent their clients in the unlawful assembly charge. One attorney, now represents nine blacks and the other three white students who face district court examination here Friday.

They also are seeking the signatures of all Ferris students on a petition declaring that the students "realize there is a problem, that they created it and that they are going to solve it."

It contains an acknowledgment of the full support of the interfraternity council, which controls the majority of the campus functions. They said plans also call for an appeal for public support from Dr. Lawrence Jensen, president of the Big Rapids Chamber of Commerce, and Mayor Bob Horan.

A rally entitled "Students United Now," is slated for Monday or Tuesday. State Sen. Robert Huber, R-Troy, Wednesday blamed administrative "permissiveness" for the continuing strife at Ferris, citing amnesties granted students following the original trouble by a State Board of Education member voiced more optimism in a talk at Big Rapids.

Addressing an assembly of Ferris honor students, Miss Marilyn Jean Kelly saluted the Student Government Board for its actions in attempting to resolve the problems.

Miss Kelly asked students to "stop waiting for someone higher up" to take care of the problem, and urged them to show that students can be "as responsible and concerned about solving social problems as any legislator, any educator or any other citizen."