Written by Ryan Howard/Reporter
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CIRCLE PINES – Mel Duncan has travelled all around the world in the last decade, getting into dangerous situations and finding peaceful solutions in a variety of global hotspots as part of Nonviolent Peaceforce, an international organization he co-founded with Quaker activist David Hartsough.

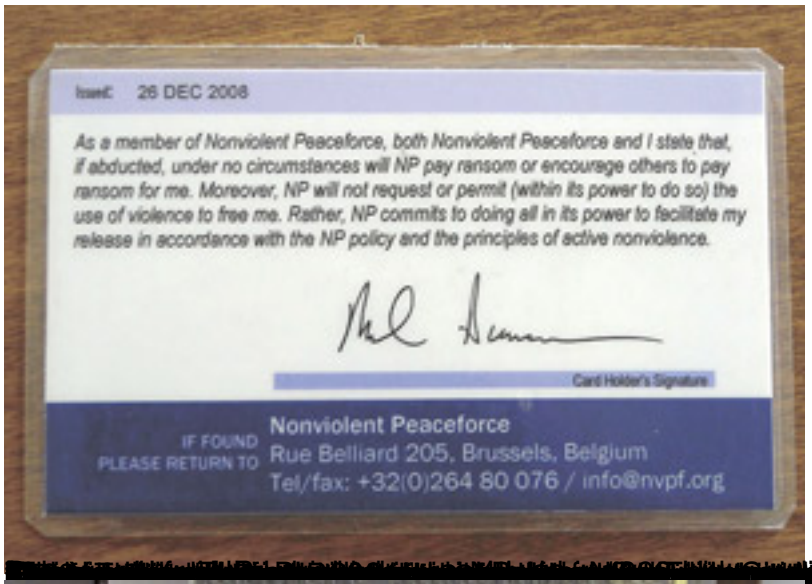
Last week, however, NP made a local stop when Duncan and the group's other leaders held their annual director's meeting at the Circle Pines Hospitality House.

John and Eleanor Yackel have operated the Hospitality House in Circle Pines next door to their home on Golden Lake for about 20 years as a local retreat and conference center. In a way, NP's stay in Circle Pines is a bit of a homecoming, as the group's organizers convened at Hospitality House in 2001 for a key meeting.

Duncan remembered the intense heat of the summer, noting that the meeting took place close to when Vikings offensive tackle Korey Stringer died from complications related to heat stroke. During breaks in the meeting, people would run out of the hospitality house and jump into the lake to cool off.

"Circle Pines has served us well," Duncan said with a smile.

For years before the 2001 meeting, Duncan had travelled around the world trying to promote peace through nonviolent means. As he talked with others who did the same and the people they were trying to protect, he realized that the presence of outsiders in a community alone can help stem the tide of violence because of political pressure. He vividly remembered one conversation with a woman affected by violence.
"She said, 'Isolation kills us,'" Duncan recalled. "'If there's no cost to our lives, we're much more likely to be disappeared.'"



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