

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration held at Dakota



The Interfaith Center for Racial Justice will host the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County at Dakota High School in Macomb Township on Jan. 18. Nicole Tuttle — For the Macomb Daily

By Nicole Tuttle , For The Macomb Daily

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One thousand people, including officials such as U.S. Rep. Sander Levin and Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, will come to Dakota High School on Jan. 18 for the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice's annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County.

The Interfaith Center for Racial Justice, founded in 1968 and located in Mount Clemens, is dedicated to creating bridges of understanding between people of multiple cultures and religious traditions. The Jan. 18 event at Dakota High School in Macomb Township marks the 29th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County that the center has held according to Rev. Michail Curro, the center's executive director. This is the third consecutive year that the event has been held at Dakota, according to Curro.

"Dakota High School and Chippewa Valley Schools has been a wonderful partner in putting on our event," Curro said. "Dakota H.S. Principal Paul Sibley is a joy to work with in both preparing for and putting on the event. Two of his teachers, Stephanie Lange and Katie McPharlin, have led teams of student volunteers whom they recruit. And Eric Roman, auditorium director, manages a small group of student volunteers who help with our audiovisual needs during our program. Finally, Paul Sibley will once again welcome the crowd and help in the announcement of our awards."

The event will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., with a formal program held in the school's auditorium for an hour, followed by dinner in the school atrium. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Seats at the event can be reserved by contacting 586-463-3675 or by e-mailing curroicrj@sbcglobal.net. Cost is \$40 per seat or \$350 for a table of 10.

Featured speakers this year are Dr. Jocelyn Benson, dean of the Wayne State University Law School and Rev. Tyrone Martin, pastor and teacher at Greater Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church.

"Our theme this year is 'Silent No More' which emerged from our reflections on racial incidents taking place all over the country and Dr. King's famous 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' particularly when he states that: 'We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.' Dean Benson, a voting rights expert, will take a macro level look at race relations and will discuss the history of the Voting Rights Act, mass incarceration of people of color, etc. Rev. Martin's comments will look at race relations in Macomb County and greater Detroit and will be a more personal commentary on the issue," Curro said.

Curro said that he anticipates attendees at the event to include Levin, Hackel, Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham, Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Anthony Marrocco, representatives from the Macomb County Treasurer's office, state legislators, several Macomb County Commissioners, local judges and other politicians.

"Nearly every school district has purchased a table and most delegations will include their superintendent. The Macomb County Supervisors Association also has a table reserved. In addition, we expect over 30 interfaith religious leaders. Further, leaders from local unions, health care, and higher education will be in attendance as well as leaders of some not-for-profit community organizations," Curro said.

The Interfaith Center for Racial Justice hosts four competitions in conjunction with the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD) each year leading up to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County event. These are the "Rise Beyond the Horizon" Mel Miller Memorial Contest for excellence in teaching diversity and understanding, a high school art contest, a middle school essay competition and an elementary oratory competition.

Competition theme, directions, guidelines and deadlines are set in September, according to Curro.

"We believe our student and teacher contests are invaluable in deepening students' understanding of Dr. King, his lessons, and the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, this year's theme draws from MLK's 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail.' Most students have never been exposed to this famous communication. Those participating in our contests read the entire letter or portions of it, learning that his message then is a relevant today as ever," Curro said.

Three finalists were selected for the high school art contest, along with an honorable mention.

Dakota High School senior Stephanie Peltier won the high school art competition.

Peltier's artwork is featured on the cover of the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice's publication for its Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County. She was also invited to the event.

Peltier's art will be displayed in the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History during February, then join other finalists' pieces in a traveling exhibit that will make rounds through Macomb County at art centers, public libraries and municipal centers.

The art of the finalists is framed and students receive cash prizes from the MISD. The second place winner was senior Sarah Dalmer of Stevenson High School. The third place winner was Anjaliah Nichols, a freshman at Mount Clemens High School. Christina Mendez, a senior at Dakota High School earned honorable mention.

Three finalists were selected in the middle school essay contest. The finalists received iTunes cards courtesy of the Macomb Reading Group. The top winner was eighth grader Krista Zihlavsky of Richmond Middle School. Richmond Middle School eighth grader Nathan Ryan earned second place, and third place was won by Chloe Kukuk, an eighth grader at Richmond Middle School. Excerpts of the top winning essay will be printed in the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice's publication for its Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County event. The winner is also invited to the event.

One winner was selected for the elementary school competition, sixth grader Makia Peyton of Duncan Elementary School. Peyton earned a pizza party for her class courtesy of the Clinton Township Diversity Committee. She will also perform at the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County.

The winner of the "Rise Beyond the Horizon" Mel Miller Memorial Award Contest is Warren Mott High School teacher Greg Kmet. He earned a trophy, a page in the event publication and will have a special video shown at the holiday event.

"Our theme, program, and event this year are all a response to the events that have been taking place across the country. Our theme of 'Silent No More' is a call to action for the 'good people' of the world to say enough is enough, the disadvantages, persecution and discrimination encountered by people of color and non-Christian faith traditions must be lessened if not eliminated fully. Our event this year may feel different as in years past we've wanted to celebrate the progress we've made while pointing to the future that more can and should be done. This year's event, in light of Ferguson, Long Island, Baltimore, Charleston, etc. doesn't call itself to a celebration, but rather an honest assessment that those with good intentions and hearts can't sit idle. We must join together to create the beloved community that MLK espoused," Curro said.