

Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King had a dream to end segregation and join people from all races, backgrounds, and ethnic groups together, and that dream will be celebrated locally with the annual program “In the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King: Surry Countians Continue the Dream,” set for Jan. 18 at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History.

The program will focus on the “sacrifices, love, learning, service, perseverance, and hope of the African-American community of Surry County.” This event is free and the public is encouraged to attend, according to co-directors Cheryl Yellow Fawn Scott and LaDonna McCarther. Light refreshments will follow the program.

Scott said the program includes an honor for a local person who has made a contribution to the community using the same attributes King talked about in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. “It is for someone who has exemplified the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King,” she added. “We look at how each individual contributes to perseverance, faith, courage, and for all people. We all aspire to be more cohesive and connected — this is the dream. We see more similarities now than differences in our skin color, ethnicity, etc.”

Now in its tenth year, McCarther said the museum will have something special for the honoree. In addition, Scott added that they will honor those who have received the recognition in years past.

Matthew Edwards, director of the Mount Airy Museum of of Regional History, said the Dr. Martin Luther King celebration has become a staple event, and is a chance to “celebrate his life, but also to celebrate members of the local African-American community.

Edwards added that the event is entirely volunteer-generated, with the museum providing the venue.

“In the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King” will include a presentation of the flag by the city of Mount Airy Honor Guard. The National Anthem will be performed by Tony Searcy.

The reception will also include Minister Joshua Wilkerson from Exodus Primitive Progressive Baptist Church, who will present pre-program music with his choir, as well as a solo.

Triumphant Penecostal Church Choir with Bishop Tony Carter, Chestnut Ridge Primitive Progressive Baptist Church's male chorus, and St. Paul AME Church Choir will perform. Elizabeth Martin will present a solo and Marie Nicholson will continue her tradition of presenting a reading of "Still I Rise." Nicholson's daughter Delila Nicholson will perform a creative dance entitled "The Dream."

There will also be a special portion of the program to honor JJ Jones High School and the students and teachers who were there. "Those who were there received a wonderful foundation, one that enabled them to go all over the country if they left and went to school somewhere else. The students who were there were able to be successful in any number of fields because of the foundation and dedication of the teachers," McArther said.

The end of the program is inclusive, she added, with a section to "celebrate the diversity of the people who participate and attend," with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King read aloud, as candles are lit to represent different religions, races, and ethnic groups working together for peace and love.

Past honorees included:

- Martha Joyce, 2005

- Shelby Jean King, 2006

- Edward McDaniel, 2007

- Melva Houston Tucker, 2008

- Perry Marc, 2009

- Geneva Gee, 2010

- Emma Jean Tucker, 2011

- James A. McCarther, Sr., 2011

- John Jessup, 2012

- Lucy Nora Taylor, 2013

The Dr. Martin Luther King event at the museum began in the fall of 2004, with the first program held Feb. 19, 2005. “We wanted to honor those who may have started out in the darkness and made it up through the light...wanted to honor someone from the area who is doing good.”

McArthur said. She added that they wanted to thank the staff of the museum, including Edwards, Guest Service Manager Nancy Davis, and Curator Amy Snyder, for their support and dedication, as well as videographer John Robert Smith, who Scott said had been “so gracious” to record the event each year.

“This has always been so uplifting,” Scott remembered. “We really enjoy the time we spend together, with music and with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King. All that loving energy in the room is wonderful. We have been blessed every year and this year will continue that tradition.”

For more information about the “In the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King” event that will take place

on Jan. 18 at 7 p.m., call the Mount Airy Museum of regional history at 786-4788.