

Dakota High School hosts MLK Day event

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By Thomas Franz✉



Rev. Tyrone Martin speaks during the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice's MLK Day event Jan. 18 at Dakota High School. (Photo by Donna Agusti)

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MACOMB TOWNSHIP — More than 1,000 members of the metro Detroit community gathered on Jan. 18 at Dakota High School for the 29th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day event hosted by the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice.

The theme of the event, "Silent No More" centered around a letter written by King in which he expressed that he was not so concerned about extremists, but the silence of good people at the time of the civil rights movement.

"That's how we're feeling, that race relations won't improve and racial equity won't be achieved until more people begin to speak out," said Michail Curro, executive director for the ICRJ.

The event featured a speech by Rev. Tyrone Martin, of the Greater Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church. Martin, who is originally from Washington, D.C., commented on his personal experiences with racial issues shortly after moving to Macomb County in 2001.

Martin recalled one story of how he and a friend weren't allowed to purchase baby formula by the manager of a local store late one night. After he settled into the county, Martin then revealed that he was denied service at a local tailor shop when the owner stated that they weren't taking any new clients.

"I remained silent," Martin said to the crowd.

Martin went on to question the crowd about whether they and others truly want to see change in matters of incarceration, education, poverty and several other areas. He closed his speech by encouraging the audience to no longer be silent when they see those type of injustices in society.

Throughout the event, attendees were asked to text responses to several questions that were meant to serve as talking points for the night.

In terms of discussing racial issues with someone from a different race, 66 percent of the respondents said they felt “comfortable.”

To describe the United States today, 58 percent felt that it remains “somewhat racist,” and 50 percent believed Macomb County is comparable to the rest of the country in terms of racial issues.

Fifty percent also said they believed voting rights for blacks are better today than 10 years ago, and 56 percent said that “young people” could have the biggest impact on diminishing racism in the U.S.

Dakota Principal Paul Sibley echoed the sentiments of the poll concerning young people making a difference in the future.

“It’s easier for kids because it’s become a part of what their life is,” Sibley said. “My hope is in the young people. When you talk to them, it’s not just about race or culture. They’re so accepting of every walk of life and every decision people make.”

The event also tied in several competitions administered through the Macomb Intermediate School District.

The Mel Miller “Rise Beyond the Horizon” Award went to George Kment, who is a social studies teacher at Warren Mott High School. Each year, the award goes to an educator who exemplifies the lessons of Miller, who Curro said was a trailblazer in encouraging tolerance and diversity as an educator in Macomb County.

Several students were also selected for awards for work related to MLK Day.

In the third year of the contest, Stephanie Peltier, of Dakota High School, won the high school art contest. Krista Zihlavsky, a student at Richmond Middle School, won the middle school essay contest, and Makia Peyton, a student at Duncan Elementary School, which is part of Utica Community Schools, won the elementary speech contest.

Peyton delivered her speech during the MLK Day event. The event opened with Joseph Cook, a student at the Arts Academy in the Woods in Fraser, performing a piece of poetry.

The event was attended by dozens of key community leaders, including U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, along with several Macomb County commissioners and school board leaders.