

MLK AWARDS HONOR A VARIETY OF PEOPLE

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A teacher who outmaneuvered a hate group, a businesswoman who emphasizes social justice, the author of a play, and a man who never tires of volunteering are among the people who will be honored this year during the celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

Living the Dream awards will go to Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi in the category of "Advocate of Peace," Jeffery A. Nelson in the category of "Human and Civil Rights," Thomas W. Rodd for "Scholarship," and Judson Wallace for "Sharing of Self."

The Governor's Living the Dream Award will go to J. Franklin Long.

Three organizations will also receive "Living the Dream" awards for service. They are the Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society; Maximizing the Achievement of African-American Children in Kanawha, or MAACK; and Taylor Books and Ann Saville.

Each year, members of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission review the names of people and organizations nominated for these awards.

State Supreme Court Justice Larry Starcher, co-chairman of the awards committee, explained some of the accomplishments of the recipients that led to their selection.

Daoudi is the imam or religious leader of the Islamic Association of West Virginia. Starcher said Daoudi has been "willing to step forward," especially after the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and "recognize the diversity of cultures." Daoudi has been active in several ecumenical efforts that promoted "brotherly love," he said.

After a group, Panzerfaust, showed up at a Boone County middle school, Jeffery A. Nelson, who is a teacher and principal, was able to sponsor "positive discussions" that turned aside the message of hate the group was trying to distribute to students. Starcher said Nelson is being honored for how he "gently confronted the message of hate."

Rodd is Starcher's law clerk, but, that aside, Starcher said he nominated Rodd because Rodd wrote a play about the late J.R. Clifford, a distinguished black West Virginia lawyer. He said Clifford had two significant education cases that were forerunners of the famous Brown v. Board of Education case that resulted in the integration of schools.

Wallace is a Fayette County resident who has had an interesting work life that has included being a coalminer, a deputy and a storeowner. But Montgomery Mayor Melba Lou White nominated Wallace because of his volunteer work. Wallace is active with organizations that help people in several ways including providing food and Christmas gifts.

A Bluefield lawyer, Long was selected for the Governor's Living the Dream Award for, among other points, his work to provide scholarships to minority students who also want to study law. Starcher said Long is active on both the state level and the national level.

The Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society earned its award because of efforts to preserve historical documents and writing that relate to black history. The organization has also started a museum.

MAACK earned recognition for the work the group does to help young black students excel in school.

Ann Saville and her store, Taylor Books, were selected for several reasons. Starcher pointed out Saville has "created an open-door policy" at her store in Charleston that offers a venue for many progressive ideas. She also is active in living history and portrays Eleanor Roosevelt. As Roosevelt, Starcher said, Saville always emphasizes "social justice."

To celebrate King's birthday, there will be events that stretch over three more days, including today. Except for today's award ceremony and luncheon, all activities are free and open to the public. The awards, including a children's poster contest, will be held at the Cultural Center.

At 3 p.m. Sunday, there will be an interfaith prayer service at the Municipal Auditorium in Charleston. The service will include prayers, musical selections, lighting of a unity candle and an address by Gov.-elect Joe Manchin III, according to Ginny Painter, communications manager for the state Division of Culture and History.

Painter also said the division will sponsor an ecumenical service to be held in conjunction with the Manchin inauguration Monday. The program of tribute to and remembrance of King will begin at 8:30 a.m. at Asbury United Methodist Church, 501 Elizabeth St., Charleston.

The symbolic bell-ringing ceremony, held annually on King Day, will take place on the south face or riverside of the Capitol as part of the inauguration ceremony.

The inaugural activities begin at 1 p.m.

At 6 p.m. Monday, West Virginia State University and the Commission will sponsor a gala at the Davis Fine Arts Building on State's campus. Titled "An Evening of Celebration and Remembrances," the gala will feature performances by West Virginians including Doris Fields, the Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus and the Charleston Area Performance Academy Speech Choir. Also, local actors will portray some of King's contemporaries, including Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan, Robert Kennedy and Rosa Parks. A reception with light refreshments will follow.

In 1983, the national King Day holiday was designated by Congress and is observed the third Monday in January, falling on or near King's Jan. 15 birthday.

The mission of the Martin Luther King Jr. West Virginia Holiday Commission is to provide programs that celebrate his life and the principles he stood for.

For more information, call 558-0220 or turn to www.wvmlkholidaycommission.org.

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