

Attendance-wise, it bodes well for an event when extra chairs must be found to accommodate the audience and all the programs are distributed — both happened here Saturday night when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was honored. King's birthday won't be celebrated officially across the nation until Monday, but a crowd estimated at more than 125 people got an early start by cramming onto the third floor of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History for "In the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King: Surry Countians Continue the Dream."

The more than two-hour event of words, music and remembrance, which was marking its 10th year, celebrated not only King's life and work but the continuation of his dream among those who are alive today. Though King was an internationally known civil rights hero, the message was that everyone can perpetuate his dream. "We recognize that each of you in this room is that quiet hero," said one speaker, Cheryl Yellow Fawn Scott, a co-director of the program along with LaDonna McCarther. "We recognize that each one of you carries that dream."

The prevailing theme of the event with a multi-racial flavor was that people of all colors must be unified in love and never forget what King stood for, while making sure his work continues. "If anybody says 'I love God' but hates his brother, he is a liar," said Robert Giesbers, pastor of North Main Church of Christ, citing scripture. Later on, during a prayer, Giesbers said of King: "His dreams were your dreams. We thank you (God) so much for a man willing to take a stand with his life." King's role in organizing the mass March on Washington, which reached its 50th anniversary in 2013, was recalled Saturday night for the role that event played in sparking landmark civil-rights legislation by Congress in 1964. "They arrived by bus, they arrived by train and they arrived by car," said Emma Jean Tucker, one of several speakers who presented readings at the museum program, said of those flocking to the capital in 1963. "One young man roller-skated from Chicago," she read. And while many gains in equality have occurred since that historic march, the overflow audience Saturday night was reminded that now is not the time to rest.

One way this was highlighted was through a creative interpretation by Marie Nicholson entitled "Still I Rise." It focused on the fact that today's people of color represent the dreams of slaves

from previous generations. "If you look around, we still have to keep marching — we still have to keep rising," Nicholson said during her presentation that had the audience riveted. "Or something may repeat itself." The message also was spread Saturday night through spirited performances by choirs of local churches, including Chestnut Ridge Progressive Primitive Baptist, Triumphant Pentecostal Holiness and Exodus Progressive Primitive Baptist. Elizabeth Martin also sang. Saturday night's event additionally featured a creative dance by a local youth, Dalila Nicholson called "The Dream." There were also recognitions of local citizens who've helped keep it alive over the years and the lighting of candles of remembrance and to honor different races and religions.

The contributions of the historically black J.J. Jones School were mentioned as well, which is being celebrated with a museum exhibit.

Awards Presented

Another highlight Saturday was the announcement of this year's recipients of the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Award. Since first being presented in 2005, it honors those who have made a contribution to the community using the same attributes King referred to in his "I Have a Dream" speech. This year that honor went to two people, Surry NAACP President Faye Carter and Alfrida Gaines. In her role with the NAACP, Carter has worked to help end racial discrimination and hatred in the area and also is active with her church. "She continues to remind us that there is strength in numbers and we are all brothers," Scott said in bestowing the award. Gaines, meanwhile, is the owner of a local transportation business who is known for providing rides to those in need and also is heavily involved with church activities and assists youths. She does so in an unassuming, low-key manner, Scott said of Gaines. "She readily assists where needed, even though all are not aware of what she does."