

Carrboro Citizen

Community celebrates MLK

Jan 21, 2010 Community

By Beth Mechum
Staff Writer

While most of the community took the day off, more than 100 citizens gathered on a chilly morning in front of the Chapel Hill Post Office, or Justice Plaza, as speakers, presenters and musicians made their way to the podium to express their thankfulness for the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. and the spirit shown by their community.

Rev. Robert Campbell was one of the many speakers Monday morning who charged those in attendance with the task of bringing a change in their social lives.

“We must be the voice of economic justice,” he said. “We must act with compassion and love.”

Music was provided by the Faith Tabernacle Oasis of Love, and members of the Carrboro and Chapel Hill branches of the NAACP also spoke.

Michelle Laws, president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch NAACP, reminded those preparing to march down Franklin Street that they weren't on their way to a funeral and should be “fired up, ready to go.”

Rally participants organized themselves for the march to First Baptist Church as the sun finally began providing warmth, and, with children leading the way, blazed down the street at a pace more suited for a trot than a march.

With every possible seat and much of the floor space of the church filled, the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Worship Service Program was ushered in with song by the Community Church of Chapel Hill Universalist Choir.

The mayors of Carrboro and Chapel Hill, Mark Chilton and Mark Kleinschmidt, extended greetings from their respective towns.

“How great it is to be part of a community that can pause to recognize this momentous occasion,” Kleinschmidt said.

Ashley Osment received the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Award for her work as a community activist in Chapel Hill, and Timothy Tyson was on hand to give the keynote address. Tyson is a research scholar at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies and author of *Blood Done Sign My Name*.

Tyson's reminded the audience that though King became the face of the civil rights movement, it was Southern black communities that were the backbone of change.

Tyson called attention to members of the community who don't have a day named after them, like the sit-in leaders, the educators in the school system and even Rosa Parks and the work she did before she became known as the woman who wouldn't sit in the back of the bus.

"We are honoring Dr. King because he is a symbol of that movement," he said.

Tyson ended his speech with a call to rid North Carolina of neighborhood schools because, he said, they lead to unjust segregation and severely hindered those on the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum.

"Segregation was never about water fountains," he said. "It was about teaching black students they were 'less than.'"

Many of the students in attendance made their way to the Lincoln Center after the speech to help in a cleanup effort.

East Chapel Hill student Malika Rauf was one of those who spent a day off of school giving back to her community

"I decided to come out here today because it is important to volunteer, because it shows we care about the community and are making a difference," Rauf said.