

King Day message: 'Everyone is connected in one way or another': www.heraldtimesonline.com

Bloomington honors civil rights leader with day of community service, remembrance, celebration

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When Lee Hamilton introduced himself to Martin Luther King Jr. at an international airport one spring day in the 1960s, they talked for an hour about their families and the challenges of their jobs.

Hamilton, who is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University, remembered the civil rights leader Monday as “unfailingly gracious,” but “profoundly weary.”

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In his keynote address for Bloomington's annual King birthday celebration at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater, Hamilton called the revolutionary King a man who saw the energy and life of language, who knew that the right word could reach the right person and change relationships and the world.

And with all of King's contradictions and self-doubts, Hamilton said, “he maintained a certain composure that made him part of another universe.”

Hamilton remembered King as a Baptist preacher wholly dedicated to the Christian gospel, who spoke in a marvelous baritone voice and was uncompromising in his opposition to the Vietnam War but militant in his support for poor people.

“I've struggled to understand the legacy of this man,” Hamilton said. “He is the only American honored with a national holiday by his name alone. ... Everybody seems to be on his side now, but they weren't when he lived.”

Monroe County leaders who also spoke at the MLK celebration included the Rev. Dennis Laffoon, Monroe County Commissioner Iris Kiesling, Indiana University President Michael McRobbie and Ivy Tech Chancellor John Whikehart, who won this year's Legacy Award.

The IU African American Choral Ensemble performed, as did A Men, an all-male a cappella group.

Earlier in the day, thousands of volunteers were celebrating King's legacy by volunteering for one of more than 50 organizations participating in the citywide “A Day On! Not a Day Off” initiative.

Monroe County Girl Scouts

Hundreds of hands knotted and knitted Monday as Monroe County Girl Scouts marked the day through crafting efforts to benefit the community.

Scouts set out to create 100 fleece blankets in celebration of the Girl Scouts' 100th anniversary this year, but within a few hours had achieved their goal and had to send people out to purchase even more fleece. The blankets will be sent to various local organizations, including the local Red Cross, Hannah's House, Monroe County United Ministries and the Shalom Community Center “to use for families who have babies and young children that they need blankets for,” according to longtime volunteer Alice Oestreich.

Other volunteers also knitted hats to be given to the Shalom Center, used old T-shirts to create knotted dog and cat toys for the humane society and painted lunch bags for the Meals on Wheels program.

Participants in the event, held at the St. Paul Catholic Center, numbered more than 220 by midway through the event and included everyone from the youngest kindergarten-age Scouts to their teenaged counterparts, as well as plenty of adult leaders.

Among the youngest were cousins Mady Harden, 7, and Bryana Walls, 6. The girls' brows were often furrowed in concentration as they knotted together brown and pink pieces of fleece to make a double-sided blanket.

Volunteering is nothing new for Edgewood High School students Samantha Sparks, 15, Cassie Leffel, 16, and Sarah McIntosh, 15, all of whom were working Monday to accumulate service hours to obtain the Girl Scout Gold Award.

As the three worked together to make a blanket, Sparks said the event gave her “a sense (that) I've been able to help someone through just doing something simple and giving up a couple hours of a day that I was going to sit in front of the TV and watch reruns, anyway.”

Bloomington Community Orchard

Participants catered to some of a garden's most important helpers at the Bloomington Community Orchard's “Birds and the Bees” day of service Monday.

Some attendees painted dried gourds to create colorful birdhouses for birds, while others assembled homes for two different types of bees at the event, held at the Banneker Community Center. The items are expected to help lure birds, which eat harmful bugs, and bees, which pollinate the fruit trees, to the 1-acre orchard located in Winslow Woods Park.

More birds and more bees mean more fruit for the volunteer-run orchard, which gives its organically grown produce away for free.

“It goes along with the spirit of Martin Luther King Day, and his commitment to service and building stronger communities,” said Toni Kessler, volunteer coordinator for the event. “The orchard is part of the community, so it helps bring the community together and make it stronger ... as well as providing fruit to the community for free.”

Brothers Adrian and Nathaniel Cox-Thurmond worked diligently Monday afternoon to slide parchment paper into many small holes dug into a solid block of wood — the future home of mason bees, which live independently in small burrows, rather than in a hive as honeybees do.

Adrian, 13, said he got a “sense of community” from his volunteering experience.

"I know MLK Day is about the civil rights movement, but I think the bigger message is community and everyone is connected in one way or another," he said.

District 10 Pro Bono Project

A volunteer attorney may have helped one woman save her home after she sought free legal advice Monday.

The District 10 Pro Bono Project partnered with about 20 local attorneys to provide free legal counsel to people, either in person or over the phone, all day Monday.

After talking to one of the attorneys, a woman who is facing foreclosure learned both that she has a defense to the foreclosure and that she is eligible for a program that may help her make her mortgage payments, District 10 manager Diane Walker said.

Other questions asked by the roughly 30 people who had sought legal advice by midday Monday included small claims, guardianship, housing, family law and immigration issues, Walker said.

Volunteer attorney Jennifer Prusak, who works for Indiana Legal Services, a nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to low-income people and families, said the event helps people who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

"There's a ... group of folks who probably earn a little too much to qualify for Indiana Legal Services services, but don't have the means to hire a private attorney," she said. "So I do think (Monday's event) serves a real need in the community."

Habitat ReStore

Ivy Tech Community College students put their skills to use for the Habitat ReStore Monday.

About 10 Ivy Tech students, plus about four other volunteers from the community, helped reorganize and spruce up the 11th Street store, including creating a safer door display, repairing and replacing light fixtures and faucets and building shelves. It's a job that might not have gotten done without the technical expertise of the students — who are studying energy or industrial technologies — store manager Norma Maier said.

The store sells donated items such as furniture, light fixtures and other home goods and uses the proceeds to help fund Habitat for Humanity homes. Having a more attractive and functional store "improves conditions for staff and shoppers," Maier said.

It was the seventh year Ivy Tech students have volunteered at the ReStore on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, chancellor Whitehart said. He said the school tries to create an environment that fosters civic engagement.

"We do this every year on this day, but our campus is committed to doing this kind of work every day of the year," he said.

**Audience members clasp hands and sing “We Shall Overcome” Monday night during the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. See a photo gallery from the celebration and King Day volunteer activities at HeraldTimesOnline.com/gallery.
Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times**



From left, Susan Johnson, David Johnson, 10, and Rafi Hasan of Phi Beta Sigma prepare paper bags for a community food drive Monday at the Hoosier Hills Food Bank. Susan Johnson, president of the Zeta Phi Beta graduate chapter, volunteered to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as well as her sorority's founder's day, which was Jan. 16, 1920.
Ryan Dorgan | Herald-Times



Elizabeth Davis helps Kiara Erickson, 6, mount an outline of her hand on a tree Monday at the Monroe County Public Library as part of a Martin Luther King Jr. Day art project.
David Snodgress | Herald-Times



Keith McCutchen directs the IU African American Chorale Ensemble during the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration Monday night at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

