

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream for America, and an annual event Saturday night at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History will illustrate how it's been realized in Surry County. The theme for this year's program featuring musical and other activities — scheduled from 7 to 9:30 p.m. on the third-floor meeting room of the museum — is "In the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: Surry Countians Continuing the Dream."

"It has something for everybody," Cheryl Yellow Fawn Scott said of the multi-faceted and entertaining event she will emcee with LaDonna McCarther. The event is free and open to the public. It is co-sponsored by the museum and the Mount Airy/Surry County Branch of the National Association of University Women (NAUW), of which Scott is president. "This is actually our 13th one," Scott said of the museum event honoring King which was snowed out one year. But a common denominator throughout that period has been heavy attendance by local residents. "Last year it was literally standing room only," Scott added of the program that tends to attract around 125 people. It is designed to be one of healing which focuses on the sacrifices, love, learning, service, perseverance and hope of the African-American community of Surry County. "It's supported well by the community and it's a wonderful evening," Scott said.

Dream lives

Modern tributes to Dr. King, who died in 1968 and whose birthday will be celebrated nationwide on Monday, usually focus on his many famous quotes and King's role in the Civil Rights Movement. Saturday night's gathering at the museum will include plenty of remembrances of his historic life and shows of gratitude for the lessons learned from King. But it will be just as focused on the here and now in terms of how his work is still under way through others, Scott said in reference to the program theme that stresses moving forward together. "It's also an opportunity to get to know people in Mount Airy who are living out that dream," she said of King's unifying message of education, inclusion and equal opportunity for all citizens to better themselves and succeed. Eight local residents will be recognized Saturday night for exemplifying those lessons in their daily lives: Dr. Carolyn McCarther Watkins, Ron Snow, Bishop Tony Carter, Jackie Snow, Clinton Brim, Vera Reynolds, Clinton Carter and Anise Hickman. One of the eight will receive the 2017 Martin Luther King Dreamer's Award, which is based on the "I Have a Dream" speech King delivered in 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The accomplishments of Surry youths in such fields as education, church activities and sports also will be recognized during Saturday night's program.

Music and more

There is also an entertainment aspect of the MLK event which has proven popular over the years. “It’s an opportunity to come together and it’s a community event — it’s one that’s filled with music and different types of performances,” Scott explained. The program typically features dance, readings of poetry from Maya Angelou and others and songs including the national anthem. A new attraction this year will be a performance by local theatrical figure Brack Llewellyn, whose is expected to illuminate a side of Martin Luther King Jr. people don’t know about. The program further will include special singing by the Chestnut Ridge Primitive Progressive Baptist Church choir, storytelling, prayer and a candle-lighting ceremony honoring King. Light refreshments are to be served after it concludes. While admission to the event is free, donations will be accepted.