

Community residents gather at the Saratoga Springs Public Library to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy (with video)

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By PATRICK H. DONGES, The Saratogian



SARATOGA SPRINGS — A diverse group of community residents gathered Monday afternoon at the Saratoga Springs Public Library to celebrate the life, lessons and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The program, which featured remarks from local officials, a discussion on a film excerpt about Dr. King and songs of hope and freedom, was presented as a part of the Saratoga Springs Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. “A Day of Doing.”

A benediction was offered by Bishop Arnold Byrd of the Soul Saving Station Church, storyteller Joe Bruchac spoke of and sang a song about a march he took through Mississippi in 1966 with King, and Rabbi Linda Motzkin led the group in a free-style rendition of “I’m On My Way to Freedom Land.”

“He was a man who lived his entire life in the service of others,” said Saratoga Springs Supervisor Joanne Yepsen, who served as master of ceremonies as a member of the event planning committee.

Mayor Scott Johnson spoke on behalf of the city, calling the celebration a time to consider King’s principles of “equality,” “diversity” and “the perseverance of the human spirit in the face of adversity.”

“I see these celebrations today as a time to pause, reflect and reaffirm as a community, as a city, our commitment to these very principles,” he said.

“You can’t really love if you’re starving to death,” said Kendall Jeter, leading the discussion after viewing an excerpt from the PBS program “American Experience: Citizen King,” during which King was portrayed as being highly concerned about the problems of poverty while other organizers were focused on resistance to the Vietnam War.

“We haven’t come a long way, baby,” said city resident Judith Fiore, reacting to a scene from the video during which King said the government should enact a redistribution of economic resources.

“He basically did what he did so that we could follow right after,” Jeter said, disagreeing with another resident who said that present-day American society could benefit from having a leader like King.

“It wasn’t about black America, it wasn’t about white America, it wasn’t about Democrats, it wasn’t about Republicans,” said Congressman Chris Gibson, joining in the discussion. “To me, Dr. King was a leader for all of us.”

Assemblyman Jim Tedisco and former city mayors Ken Klotz and A.C. Riley were also in attendance.