

HardisonInk.com

Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration in Williston draws a crowd



The Williston Middel High School Jr. ROTC Color Guard leads the parade.

Story and Photos By Terry Witt, Senior Reporter © Jan. 15, 2017 at 6:57 a.m.

WILLISTON -- The life and achievements of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were celebrated Saturday (Jan. 14) in Williston with a parade down U.S. Alt. 27 and a gathering afterward at the Heritage Park Pavilion.

HardisonInk.com

Pastor Johnnie Jones III, president of the Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc., the group that organized the celebration, acknowledged that African Americans have made great strides since the era of King but not in all areas of endeavor.



Two young ladies from the Fountain of Life Church, pastored by the Rev. Johnnie Jones III, wave to onlookers along the parade route.

“On some fronts yes, on some fronts no,” Jones said in an interview at the celebration. “I think there have been, in my opinion, far too many firsts; first African American for this and that. I think at this point we ought to be beyond that. I think it should be something that is not special or different, that the person holding an office, holding a job or appointed to a position is African American. I think we should be past that, but we’re not in a post-racial area.”



A car that is the entry of the Citizens for an Engaged Electorate is seen in the parade. Sharon Reynolds was driving. The CEE notes ‘Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.’

HardisonInk.com



Enjoying the beautiful sunlight and the view, a lady from the Greater Rockhill Mission Baptist Church waves ‘Hello.’

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a federal holiday on Monday (Jan. 16).

Jones was told by a reporter about an encounter prior to the parade with two African Americans who were dining at McDonalds but didn't plan to attend the parade that would honor King. Jones was asked what he thought about the two gentlemen having no interest in the parade.

“That type of thinking is some of the same type of things Dr. King had to endure,” Jones said. “Apathy has always been a problem with community organizing.”

HardisonInk.com



Pastor Johnnie Jones III, president of the Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc., the organization that organized the celebration, speaks to the crowd.

He added that the civil rights movement has always been about “a few walking for the many.” He said that’s what the parade represented, “the few that stand up for the rights of the many.” He said the parade also remembers someone who had an impact on the country and the lives of people. He said many people may have slept-in Saturday morning rather than participate in the parade. He said, too, though, that the pavilion at Heritage Park was full of young people, and filled a lot of life and excitement in the “lives of all people, all races and ethnic backgrounds.”

HardisonInk.com



Levy County Commissioner Matt Brooks speaks at the celebration in Williston honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Two of the guest speakers were Levy County Commissioner Matt Brooks, who rode in the parade with his wife and children, and Bronson Mayor Bruce Greenlee who rode in a Bronson fire truck along the parade route.

Williston Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat also rode in the parade and spoke to people at the gathering.

Levy County Commissioner Brooks said he was happy to see so many young people from the community present. He said the presence of so many young people meant the parents had taken the time to bring them to the event and learn about King's legacy. Brooks said King counseled, "We are all one people."

Brooks said that lesson must be learned to "break the chain and the cycle that we created a long time ago. It starts with our youth and our kids."

"Dr. King said do not fight darkness with darkness; you fight with love," Brooks said. "That's what we need to pour into the kids of our community; we have to fight darkness with love and we got to fight it as one."

Pastor Jones complimented Commissioner Brooks, noting he made an effort to appear in the parade and to speak to the assembled crowd even though he isn't up for re-election until 2020.

"He's still here," Jones said, bringing applause from the crowd. Brooks was elected in August. He was the only county-elected official to participate in the event.

HardisonInk.com



Bronson Mayor Bruce Greenlee encourages young people and adults to exhibit unity, humility and just ‘stay in the game’ in order to grow as a person.

Mayor Greenlee was also commended by Jones for participating in an event he wasn't required to attend and doesn't need for re-election in Bronson. The compliment drew applause.

Greenlee counseled young people present how to maintain a course in life that will allow them to grow.

“That is unity, humility and just staying in the game,” Greenlee said. “I tell people all the time -- things will come against you, but you have to be willing to stand. If you have God, you will be able to stand. If you stay in the game, all the things that went against you; they're going to eventually turn. We can't give up. We've come a long way.”

Mayor Hethcoat noted that there are forces in the world that are “trying to divide people, not just by race, not just by family, but everything.”

“We have to stand up to that, and that's what we need to work for,” Hethcoat said.

Hethcoat added that it's also important to “lift up the Lord.” He said the accomplishments of people should be honored when they do something good, but he added, “We can do nothing without the Lord.”

His comment brought the loudest response and applause of the afternoon.