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Historic march set for Chiefland

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. March scheduled for Chiefland on Jan. 21, 2019

Pastor Alex Christian of First United Methodist Church of Chiefland stands at the podium as Alex Christian of First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, Pastor Lance Hayes of Potter House Exalting of Chiefland stands near to him Tuesday evening (Nov. 12) when the men succeeded in starting the effort required for a march to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Jan. 21 in Chiefland.



Photos and Story

By Jeff M, Hardison © Nov. 13, 2018 at 10:18 a.m.

CHIEFLAND – A few good men approached the Chiefland City Commission Tuesday (Nov. 13) and succeeded in setting the wheels in motion for a march that is historic for that municipality.

Chiefland Police Chief Scott Anderson tells the City Commission about a

successful raid of eight Internet cafés formerly operating in Chiefland. The chief also mentioned the costs to the CPD, and the city, for law enforcement required during parades down U.S. Highway 19 in Chiefland.



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After the meeting Tuesday, some of the leaders seeking to make the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. March become a reality in Chiefland are seen here. They are (from left) Pastor Alex Christian of First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, Pastor Lance Hayes of Potter House Exalting of Chiefland, Minnie Hayes of Potter House Exalting of Chiefland and Robert Wells, one of the founders of the Levy County Prevention Coalition.

Pastor Alex Christian of First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, Pastor Lance Hayes of Potter House Exalting of Chiefland and Robert Wells, one of the founders of the Levy County Prevention Coalition as well as a counselor with Meridian Behavioral Health Inc., all spoke in favor of conducting the first-ever Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade in Chiefland on Jan. 21, 2019 – Martin Luther King Day.

Earlier Tuesday evening, Pastor Hayes had succeeded in securing the Tommy Usher Community Center for Jan. 10 from 5 to 7 p.m. for a countywide domestic abuse awareness program. Hayes said he anticipates between 15 and 18 vendors to be there that evening for a free event that is open to the public, where people can obtain information and other resources in the effort to reduce the many forms of abuse.

City Commissioner Donald Lawrence, a retired teacher and coach, made a motion, seconded by City Commissioner Tim West, an RV park developer, to approve the request to waive the \$75 Tommy Usher Center booking fee as well as the \$20-per-hour fee and the deposit normally required to use that facility.

Voting in favor of that motion were Lawrence, West, Mayor Betty Walker and Vice Mayor Chris Jones.

Chiefland City Commissioner Rollin Hudson was absent Tuesday night.

Then Pastor Christian of First United Methodist Church of Chiefland requested and received, again by a 4-0 Lawrence-West motion, approval to have a march starting at 11 a.m. on Jan. 21 at First United Methodist Church of Chiefland. This Martin Luther King March will go southbound from the church on Main Street (U.S. Highway 19) and

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Northeast Seventh Avenue to the Chiefland City Park next to the Historic Chiefland Train Depot on Southeast Second Avenue.

Pastor Christian said after the march there is a relatively short program scheduled at the park to honor the memory and accomplishments of Dr. King, and the reverend anticipates it concluding at 1 p.m.

Chiefland Police Chief Scott Anderson brought the City Commission into awareness that it will cost the Chiefland Police Department \$1,300 that he had not budgeted for this march to happen on Jan. 21.

Chief Anderson said the CPD spent \$1,300 to accommodate the Walk For Jesus last year and there were only 12 people participating. The chief said he has no qualms about the Walk For Jesus or the MLK March, he just wants the city leaders to be aware he had not budgeted for it.

While no person argued for or against the merits of Christianity or of the recognition of a Christian preacher who was assassinated during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Chief Anderson just wanted the city to know it was not in his department's budget.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. {Jan. 15, 1929-April 4, 1968} was an American Baptist minister and activist who became one of the most visible spokesmen and leaders in the American Civil Rights Movement from 1954 until he was assassinated in 1968.

Vice Mayor Jones said he believes some Chiefland business interests may donate some money to the city to help pay for this first-ever MLK March in Chiefland. Wells said the LCPC may be able to donate some funds to the city for this purpose.

While Jones and Wells spoke about possible donors to cover the CPD costs from the march, Anderson said on Tuesday that he had heard the Walk For Jesus promoters were allegedly going to help cover the CPD's expense for that event, but it never happened.

Chief Anderson said he just wants the City Commission to remember that every time the city conducts a parade or a march, the CPD has to bring every CPD officer into action as well as to seek help from the Levy County Sheriff's Office and its Citizens On Patrol.

The Chiefland High School Homecoming Parade and the Watermelon Festival Parade are a couple of events the chief budgets for each year, he said. When he saw a mere dozen people in the Walk For Jesus event, Chief Anderson noticed a potential problem with future requests of a similar nature.

Essentially, the police chief is expressing to the City Commission that he is not in favor of unfunded mandates by elected officials on department heads who must bring about the required resources for safety.

Chief Anderson stays within his budget and when he sees an issue that can take that bottom line into the debt zone, he alerts the City Commission.

Even the recent raid of suspected illegal Internet cafés, Chief Anderson said on Tuesday morning (Nov. 13) in a telephone interview, required him to wait until after the start of the fiscal year (Oct. 1) so that the big operation could be funded.

Chief Anderson said there is a reality of the bottom-line for law enforcement. Anderson did not even ask Williston Police Chief Dennis Strow or Cedar Key Police Chief Virgil Sandlin for help from their cities' departments in the raid on Internet cafés in Chiefland, he said, because he knows their budgets have little to zero leeway for unanticipated costs.

Chief Strow has asked the CPD for help with its July 5 parades in the past, Chief

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Anderson said, and Chiefland has routinely said it regretfully cannot help.

In regard to the raid of the suspected illegal gambling houses, Chief Anderson asked the City Commission on Tuesday night to have a barbecue event in January to say “Thank you” to the law enforcement officers from the Levy County Sheriff’s Office, the Ocala Police Department, the Marion County Sheriff’s Office and the Columbia County Sheriff’s Office for their help.

The City Commission agreed, but there was no mention of funding for it. The chief on Tuesday morning said the officers of the CPD may end up donating to make this barbecue happen for those officers who came from other departments to assist the CPD.

As for the Friends of the CPD and the Halloween Haunted House this year, Chief Anderson said funds raised from that event – where every CPD officer volunteered on their own time – will go to buying Christmas gifts for needy children.

Meanwhile in regard to a march to honor Dr. King n MLK Day 2019, Mayor Walker said she has wanted this to happen in Chiefland for several years.

As a result of the 4-0 vote Tuesday night, the event is on track to occur. While Wells mentioned that there is a movement for a countywide MLK event, with people from Bronson and Williston being interested, the past couple of years has shown no unity from the municipalities for one event in any particular city.

Pastor Christian and Pastor Hayes alluded to a unified church effort from the community’s houses of worship for the abuse-awareness program set for the early evening of Jan. 10 at the Tommy Usher Center.

As shown in the story, photos and three minutes of video clips that can be seen by clicking [HERE](#), there was a very successful 13th Annual MLK Parade and Ceremony in Cross City (Dixie County) in January of this year.