

Obama election gives 'wow' to King dinner

Published: Monday, December 29, 2008

By Frank DeFrank, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration on Jan. 19 will take on a different air this year.

Decidedly different.

Less than 24 hours after the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice hosts the 22nd annual event that honors the slain civil rights leader, America's first black president will take office.

"There is a big 'Wow' factor," said the Rev. Michail Curro, director of the Interfaith Center. "Martin must be saying, 'Hallelujah!'"

King fought for justice, equality and opportunity for all Americans for most of his life before he was gunned down by an assassin in Memphis, Tenn., in April 1968.

Now, more than 40 years after the man died, Obama's election marks a giant step toward fulfilling King's dream.

"(Obama's) election isn't the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream," Curro said. "But if one individual can make it, we can all live it."

The Rev. Tyrone Martin, pastor of Greater Morningstar Baptist Church in Mount Clemens, said Obama's election should remind all Americans of the nation's legacy as "a melting pot."

The president-elect is the offspring of a Kenyan man and an American woman who never married. His maternal grandparents played a key role in raising him.

Despite meager means, Obama's mother saw to it that her son had access to quality education.

The message, Martin said: "Given a chance, anybody can achieve."

The theme of this year's dinner is "One Region, One Dream," and the focus is on education. Keynote speakers include Macomb Community College President Jim

Jacobs and his Wayne State University counterpart, Jay Noren.

The dinner is held annually on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the federal holiday established in honor of the former preacher. Each year, event organizers battle the perception that the King Day Dinner is a "black holiday." In the aftermath of Obama's election, they hope that myth is further shattered.

"It's a national holiday for a reason," said Renee Arrington-Johnson, chairwoman of the holiday celebration committee. "Just like Barack Obama is the president for everybody, it's a holiday for everybody."

After several years of success at the Sterling Inn, this year's dinner will be held at the Royalty House in Warren. Tickets are \$35 for individuals or tables of 10 are available for \$250. Sponsorships by organizations or groups also can be purchased for \$350. Doors open at 5 p.m. with dinner scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m.

For reservations or additional information, contact the Interfaith Center for Social Justice at (586) 463-3675 or visit the organization's Web site at www.ICRJ.org.