

Front Page News

Thursday, January 11th, 2024

3 days of events planned in Grants Pass to honor MLK



SCOTT STODDARD/Daily Courier

Rev. Ernestein Flemister of St. Luke's Episcopal Church addresses the audience during the Martin Luther King Jr. celebration at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Grants Pass on Monday night.

By Kathleen Alaks of the Daily Courier

While the upcoming Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in Grants Pass will certainly honor the legacy of the civil rights leader, it also will raise up the work of ordinary citizens.

"It takes all the people inspired by Dr. King's work to make a difference. It's not a movement with King alone," said Gabi Johnson, a volunteer with Grants Pass Remembrance, one of the groups organizing three days of MLK Day events, beginning Friday, in Grants Pass.

Other groups collaborating in the event planning are the Rogue Community College Diversity Programming Board, the Grants Pass High School Theatre Department, and a trio of local churches: Newman United Methodist, St. Luke's Episcopal and Bethany Presbyterian.

The theme of the weekend's events is "Celebrating the Extraordinary in Ordinary People."

"This year we are excited to share about how ordinary people can do extraordinary things," said the Rev. Ryan Scott, senior pastor at Newman United Methodist Church. "We don't need any special qualifications to fight for justice and reconciliation. We all have the power to do amazing things to move our community and nation forward."

"And there are amazing things going on in our community," Johnson said. "We all are the ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

The weekend of events includes a one-act play festival on Friday, a community gathering on Saturday and a celebration with story and song on Monday.

All events are free and open to the public.



First up is the one-act play festival, at 6 p.m. Friday at the Grants Pass High School Performing Arts Center.

It will feature performances of student-directed short plays that celebrate the "ordinary people" theme.

GPHS students put on a one-act festival every January, with student teams overseeing all aspects of production: play selection, auditioning and casting, putting together sets, props and costumes, and directing the finished product.

An effort to include the students last year did not work out timing-wise, but this year, the high school's theater department is eagerly on board, said Julia Cuppy, the school's theater instructor.

"It's a great opportunity for the students to select material connected to the themes and teachings of Dr. King," Cuppy said.

The lineup includes "The Election," a play about student body president candidates who learn to put aside their differences to work together for a common cause; and "The Lottery," based on the short story by Shirley Jackson, which explores themes of communal violence, sexism and the dangers of blindly following tradition.

"They chose plays that resonate with young people ... that connect to the way they see the world," Cuppy said.

Saturday's community gathering starts at 4:30 p.m., also at the PAC.

"It's a time of hearing from different community members of all ages," Johnson said. "And from people in our community doing extraordinary work."

The gathering starts with presentations and stories, including speakers from the newly formed GPHS Black Student Union, and music by the Kirby Shaw Singers.

That will be followed by an information fair with booths by local nonprofits, community resources and food vendors.

Among the local organizations participating on Saturday are the Josephine County Food Bank, Josephine Community Library, Hearts With A Mission, Northwest Seasonal Workers Association, Rogue Community College, Wildlife Images, Community Alliance of Tenants, Max's Mission, Equity Project, Soroptimist International River Valley, Shelter Friends, Partners Assisting the Homeless, SOESD Indian Education, American Connection Corps, and Southern Oregon Climate Action Now.

The final event of the weekend is a community celebration at 6 p.m. Monday — officially Martin Luther King Jr. Day — at Newman United Methodist Church, followed by a reception with finger food.

The evening program will feature a keynote address by the Rev. Ernestine Flemister, pastor at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, a longtime advocate for racial justice and reconciliation and the first Black clergy person to serve at St. Luke's.

The service also will include an invocation from Rabbi Russell McAlmond, music from Tim Wallace and Michelle LeComte, and a presentation by Johnson about Grants Pass Remembrance.

"Remembering Dr. King allows us to take stock of how far we've come and how far we still need to go as a society when it comes to racial equality and justice," said Scott.

The program will be livestreamed on Newman's Facebook page.

Reach reporter Kathleen Alaks at 541-474-3815 or kalaks@thedailycourier.com.

Celebrate a legacy

WHAT: One Act Festival, student-directed performances of short plays celebrating "Ordinary People"

WHEN: 6 p.m. Friday

WHERE: Grants Pass High School Performing Arts Center, Northeast Eighth and Olive streets, Grants Pass

ADMISSION: Free

INFORMATION: tinyurl.com/mlkweekend2024

WHAT: Community Gathering, creative presentation by students and community members and a fair with food vendors

WHEN: 4:30 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Grants Pass High School Performing Arts Center, Northeast Eighth and Olive streets, Grants Pass

ADMISSION: Free

INFORMATION: tinyurl.com/mlkweekend2024

WHAT: Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration, with speakers, live music, finger foods

WHEN: 6 p.m. Monday

WHERE: Newman United Methodist Church, 132 N.E. B St., Grants Pass

LIVESTREAM: Newman church's Facebook page

ADMISSION: Free

INFORMATION: Rev. Ryan Scott, 541-479-5369; Lucia Bartscher, 541-956-7124

In Ashland

WHAT: Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration, with speakers, performances, slide show presentations

WHEN: Noon Monday

WHERE: Historic Ashland Armory, 208 Oak St.

LIVESTREAM: somlk.org

ADMISSION: Free

INFORMATION: somlk.org.