

Martin Luther King Day will be celebrated nationwide Monday, but local residents will get a head start on that Saturday night with an annual program honoring the iconic civil rights leader. Mount Airy Museum of Regional History once again is hosting the event, now in its 12th year, which will begin at 7 p.m. on the museum's third [floor](#). The program that is free and open to the public typically is heavily attended — even on a cold January night.

"It's always a big one — standing room only last year," museum Executive [Director](#) Matt Edwards commented regarding the gathering that has been known to draw up to 125 people. Saturday night's event will include music, recitations of works by authors such as Maya Angelou and special recognitions of local citizens. Its focus not only will honor the

[life](#)

of King and the lessons he espoused, but how those citizens are carrying on his dream nearly 50 years after King's death. This will include an emphasis on local young people who are setting a good example for others. "We did that last year for the first time, specifically recognizing youths," said Cheryl Yellow Fawn Scott, one of the organizers of the event. Four young people are scheduled to be highlighted as part of the program's 2016 Youth of Excellence theme — Iyana Hughes, Cheyenne Allen, Shapell Hughes and Braxton Easter. These youths will be recognized for making a collective difference through academic achievements, community activities, church involvement and other areas, Scott said.

Five adults who have distinguished themselves in the community also will be part of Saturday's program, to include E.J. Spencer, Karl Allen, Donnie Nicholson, Jimmy Stockton and Edward Spencer. The lives and work of each will be highlighted, Scott said, and one of the five will be named this year's [recipient](#) of the Martin Luther King Dreamer's Award. It basically is named for the "I Have a Dream" speech King delivered in 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Its focus on the fine examples set by local residents is one reason why the annual MLK program at the museum is so popular, according to LaDonna McCarther, another of its organizers. Attendees are able to see living embodiments of King's teachings and concern for the betterment of mankind. "I think it's because, number one, it recognizes individuals in Surry County and Mount Airy city that have contributed to the area, who have started in unlikely situations and become productive citizens," McCarther said of the annual program's importance. She mentioned how some have overcome various obstacles and succeeded via the struggle for equality that Dr. King championed. "They're role models."

Program highlights

Among other activities or individuals slated to be part of Saturday night's program are:

- Terri Ingalls, the president-elect of the North Carolina Storytelling Guild, who will render a relevant story based on true events;

- A poetic presentation by Marie Nicholson from Maya Angelou's "And Still I Rise;"

- Singer and songwriter Evelyn Gentry Howie;

- Excerpts from poet James Weldon Johnson's "God's Trombones"/"Go Down Death," presented by Chrissie Watkins;

- Soloists Dennis France and Eric Strickland;

- The singing of the national anthem by Tracy Greenwood;

- An appearance by the City of Mount Airy Honor Guard;

- A reading by Jonathan Lightfoot;

- "The Lord's Prayer," featuring a delivery of the prayer in American sign language by Janice Thompson.

Other participants could be added before the program is finalized, according to McCarther, who added that refreshments will be served afterward. "We couldn't do it without the staff there at the museum," she said of the help it gives in organizing the event. Refreshments will be served

after the program.