Near the beginning of a ceremony honoring Martin Luther King Jr. Saturday night, event organizer Cheryl Yellow Fawn Scott asked each half of the audience to stand and thank the people in the other half. The crowd of more than 100, filling the third floor of the Mount Airy Museum of Modern History and divided only by the center aisle, happily complied. The gesture set the tone for the evening, a lesson in brotherhood and a reminder of how the civil rights icon changed lives in big ways and small. Now in its 12th year, the program titled, “In The Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Surry Countians Continuing the Dream,” serves as a bridge between past, present and future.

Through musical performances, poetry, storytelling and speakers sharing excerpts from some of King’s most poignant speeches and writings, the civil rights icon and other influential figures were honored and remembered. Chrissie Watkins’ dynamic reading of the poem “Go Down, Death (A Funeral Sermon)” by James Weldon Johnson drew one of many standing ovations. Other performances at the gathering included Marie Nicholson’s creative interpretation of “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou, “His Eye is on the Sparrow” sung by soloist Revetta King, and storyteller Terri Ingalls’ story of Robert Small’s “pivotal moment.” A rendition of Jesus, My Rock by the Triumphant Pentecostal Church Choir had most people’s hands clapping and feet stomping.

With an eye toward the present, several individuals were recognized at intervals throughout the program for their work embodying different aspects of King’s teaching: E.J. Spencer, self-reliance, Karl Allen, leadership; Edward Spencer, perseverance; and Donnie Nicholson, service. “I love people,” Spencer said to the audience, noting a simple philosophy that drove him: “Treat people like you want to be treated.” Many responded to that with an emphatic “Amen.” The program culminated with the presentation of the annual Martin Luther King Dreamer’s Award — named for King’s most famous speech — which was given to Jimmy Stockton. Scott said that the most important group highlighted in the program is that who represent the future. Four young people were recognized for their activism and contributions to church and community: Cheyenne Allen, Iyana Hughes, Shapell Hughes and Braxton Easter. “We look at the youth who are in different ways embodying the life and ways of Dr. King,” Scott said. “We honor and recognize them for the work that they do.”

Matthew Edwards, museum director, said the event is one he looks forward to bringing his children to every year. “This is always one of our best attended programs,” he said. “We’re just the host venue, and we’re grateful to be beneficiaries to this event.” “It’s like old home week here,” Edwards told the crowd of more than 100. “A lot of the folks have been coming here for years. It’s great to have them here at the museum.”