

With temperatures in the 20s and a stiff north wind, Saturday night offered less-than-optimum conditions for a community gathering — but this didn't stop more than 125 people from honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. “When you see people come out when it's cold — the weather is not inviting — I think it shows people value what's important,” said Cheryl “Yellow Fawn” Scott, co-director of a 13th-annual King tribute event.

The program, “In the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — Surry Countians Continuing the Dream,” was held at Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, playing to a packed house. “It is always a tremendous honor to see this many folks come out for this program,” museum Executive Director Matt Edwards said of what is one of the facility's more well-attended events each year. “It is a testament to Dr. King's legacy and the work of our local volunteers.”

The ensuing program highlighted the fact that while he was felled by an assassin's bullet in 1968, King's dream of equality for all continues to live on in the hearts of folks here and elsewhere. This was accomplished Saturday night through musical selections such as “This Little Light of Mind,” “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” “Never Have to be Alone” and others; prayer; creative interpretations; candle lightings in Dr. King's memory; and special remarks about the impression his incredible life made on America.

King entered the Baptist ministry in the late 1940s and was caught up in the civil rights struggle of the 1950s, becoming the most-visible activist and leader in the movement while relying on tactics of non-violence and civil disobedience. He campaigned against inequality throughout the South, including leading the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott. One of the key moments of his civil rights icon's career came in 1963 when he helped organize a march on Washington, where he delivered his landmark “I Have a Dream” speech.

Terri Ingalls, a local storyteller who was one of the speakers on Saturday night's program, recalled that historic event that occurred while she was coming of age in a nearby state. “I was deeply aware of segregation — I grew up in South Carolina,” Ingalls told the audience. “I saw it daily, and I knew it was wrong.” Ingalls watched televised coverage of the Washington event, admittedly because folk music performers she wanted to see were there, including Joan Baez and Peter, Paul and Mary. But Ingalls found herself captivated by King's words during his historic speech, when he outlined his “dream” of people of all colors living in harmony. Also, King expressed the hope that “my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” “And in the end I sat stunned,” Ingalls said of hearing King's message. “I was surprised to find my face awash

with tears when it was done.”

Another profound segment of Saturday night's program occurred when Scott detailed the history of martyrs in the civil rights struggle, both black and white, who fell victim to bombings and other acts of violence during the turbulent era. The weapon of love eventually overcame those of hate, such as bombs and guns, Scott said.

A key goal of Saturday's event involved emphasizing how the lessons espoused by King continue to be exemplified by the lives of folks in Surry County. Special recognition was given to two local families illustrating the value of religion and education, the Posey and Betty Reynolds family, which included 17 children, five of whom survive today, and that of Luther and Willie Rawley. Members of those families have made a mark in such fields as industry, business, engineering, criminal justice and others.

Local youths also were recognized Saturday and two adults were announced as Dr. Martin King Jr. honorees, James Dalton and Col. Don Belle. While he received that special honor Saturday night, Belle said he regularly attends the King tribute events at the museum for one basic reason: “We love this country and we love the many things that Dr. King and the people who were with him have accomplished — black and white.”