



Annual scholarship breakfast of the Greater Bristol NAACP saw local leaders celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Dr. Eddie Whitehead

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BRISTOL – The annual scholarship breakfast of the Greater Bristol NAACP saw local leaders celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Dr. Eddie Whitehead.

The breakfast was held at Bristol Eastern High School on Martin Luther King Jr. Day this Monday. It was attended by several dozen people, including local legislators, police officers, city councilors, board of education members, and leaders of civic organizations who packed the cafeteria at the school. Breakfast was provided by Saint’s Restaurant in Southington.



Brian Johnson Staff Tim Camerl, president of the Greater Bristol Branch of the NAACP, speaks at the scholarship breakfast held in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Dr. Eddie Whitehead.

Tim Camerl, president of the Greater Bristol NAACP thanked all who attended the event.

“The diverse population this morning reflects what Bristol looks like,” he said. “The NAACP is so pleased to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at this breakfast with all of you.”

Rev. Patricia Washington Rice, pastor at Beulah A.M.E. Zion Church, opened the event with an invocation and the blessing of the food. She asked God to help them to honor King’s legacy and said that it is “never too late” to live out his dream by getting rid of hate and bringing in love.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Latanya Farrell, principal at Stafford Elementary School, led those gathered in singing “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson, which the program referred to as the “negro national anthem.”

Corey Nagle, a local science teacher at Bristol Central High School, welcomed the guests and explained how the NAACP Scholarship, administered through the Main Street Community Foundation, supports students in Bristol, Southington, Plainville and Plymouth.

Mayor Jeff Caggiano then spoke. He began by thanking the local NAACP for their leadership last June when racist flyers were found in Bristol. He said that Bristol and the NAACP agree with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that “inclusion is key” and that “everyone is welcome” in Bristol. He said that he hopes people will avoid the far left and the far right and continue to listen to their neighbors.

Caggiano also spoke about how the city came together following the killing of two local police officers, Dustin DeMonte and Alex Hamzy, on Oct. 12. He said he hopes that the positive momentum created from that tragedy continues.

After Caggiano recognized the community leaders who attended, including some from surrounding towns, Sen. Henri Martin gave his greetings from the state of Connecticut.

“Today we continue to remember Martin Luther King Jr.’s words and actions,” he said. “I thank the NAACP for organizing this event and bringing our community together. We should do this more than once a year.”

Martin also spoke about some of the new bills proposed in the legislature. He spoke of the need to provide more workforce development and congratulated Bristol Schools and the Central CT Chambers of Commerce for their efforts to do so. He also spoke about a bill which would make assaulting healthcare workers a Class C Felony. He said that this has been a growing problem at local hospitals.

In addition, Martin spoke in support of a bill which would require shared parenting for separated couples. People raised by only a single parent, he said, have higher rates of dropping out of high school, suicide and homelessness.

Martin ended his remarks by saying that Bristol makes sure that all races are included in the community and that “equality is our creed.”

After Martin’s remarks, Ronetta Stokes, granddaughter of Eddie Whitehead, spoke about her grandfather’s legacy. Whitehead, who was born in 1920 and died in 2009, was chaplain of the Bristol Police Department, a founding member of the local NAACP and founder of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

Whitehead, Stokes said, wanted to see more diversity in Bristol, and was very outspoken and passionate. She said he was “a man of many words.” He was presented the key to the city by former mayor Bill Stortz.

“He often spoke of faith, family and having a good foundation,” said Stokes. “His famous quote was ‘keep the faith baby.’”

Several students from Southington High School, Bristol Eastern High School and Bristol Central High School then each took turns reading quotes from Martin Luther King Jr.,

highlighting his views on loving one's enemies, taking action to ensure "a rightful place in God's world" and how the destiny of black and white Americans are tied together.

Bristol native Danisha Craig was then introduced as the keynote speaker. A former Boys & Girls Club of Bristol Youth of the Year in 2012, she now works at the Department of Energy in Washington, DC. Craig spoke to how Bristol provided her with numerous opportunities both in terms of education and extracurricular activities like basketball, karate, track and art programs.

"Bristol provided me a chance to stand as a leader and show other students who looked like me that there would be opportunities for them," she said. "What the Bristol community saw in me at 16, the White House now sees in me as an adult."

Craig said that the NAACP scholarship helps students to attain bright futures. She encouraged students to hold their heads high and surround themselves with positive people.

Camerl, in his closing remarks, said that Craig exemplifies the importance of a community standing together.

"The NAACP stands with and for Bristol," he said. "By making Bristol a better place, we all win. Bristol is no better than our personal best. I hope we can give our best back together."

The event closed with a prayer from Rev. Will Dennis, who thanked God for the goodness of Martin Luther King Jr., whom he described as a "servant leader" who had "gone to rest" with God. He asked that God help people to demonstrate the unity and compassion that he lived by.

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