

King's inspiration still burns bright

South Haven pastor receives Diversity Award; Upton cites example set by John Lewis

By **LOUISE WREGE**
HP Staff Writer

BENTON TOWNSHIP — A South Haven pastor who marched twice with Martin Luther King Jr. was the recipient Monday of the Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Award during Lake Michigan College's 22nd annual celebration honoring the late civil rights icon.

"I never received anything like this award," said Pastor Aaron Cobbs of Spiritual Church of Christ in South Haven, on Martin Luther

King Jr. Day. "Didn't know what to say, but I'm here. And I'm just so grateful to receive this, and I hope I can live up to it, the expectations."

LMC President Emeritus Robert Harrison said Cobbs was chosen because he was the inspiration behind the Seed of Hope Scholarship, which was created by residents in South Haven.



COBBS

"His goal was to fund the education of children in Ward 1, an area that has been underserved in the past," Harrison said. "According to Rev. Cobbs, many kids don't think much about education and see no hope to get out of poverty."

Cobbs said his favorite speech by King was "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution."

"One line he said in that speech is that we are all tied together in one garment of destiny," he said. "We all need one another."

More than 400 people attended the celebration, where presenters spoke on the theme, "Moving Forward," inspired by the King quote, "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward."

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, R-St. Joseph, said Southwest Michigan needs to move forward into 2017 by helping each other.

See MLK, page A8



Louise Wrege / HP staff

Students from the All God's Children Community Choir Teen Ensemble perform Monday during the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Breakfast in the Mendal Center of Lake Michigan College in Benton Township.

MLK

From page A1

He said it is going to be a year of great change, but also of great adversity and challenges.

"But, the bottom line is, I hope it will be a year of opportunity as well," Upton said. "We're going to have to lean on our neighbors, our friends, our family, our churches, our institutions. We cannot let the divisiveness of the national scene hold us back. Now, more than every, we have got to come together."

Upton said he recently saw the movie "Hidden Figures," which reminded him what life was like for African-Americans not that long ago.

"It was a powerful movie with certainly a powerful message," he said. "It's about three brilliant African-American women who really set the stage, a pivotal role to make sure that John Glenn got into space and back safely."

He said the true story happened in 1962.

"African-Americans, especially women, were heavily discriminated against," he said. "And at every turn they'd face harsh segregation and outright hostility."

Added Upton: "I know that there are a good number of folks in this room and across the country who have also had that personal experience with discrimination, that hateful, cruel hate that's impacted a lot of us," he said.

He said the country has come a long way, but must strive to be better.

"We face some real challenges when it comes to racism and discrimination, but the strides that we've made have been incredible," he said. "Yes, (U.S. Rep.) John Lewis is my dear friend. A colleague. An icon. And I feel fortunate that I've been able to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with him in Selma ... three times."

Lewis made international news after entering into a public

feud with President-elect Donald Trump ahead of Friday's inauguration.

Upton said that when Lewis speaks, people understand that the scars of the past never go away.

"But for someone who is so brutalized, he's forgiving," Upton said. "He actually went to the bed of Gov. George Wallace to accept his apology before he died."

A Race Relations Council Forum will be today from noon to 2 p.m. at LMC's Napier Avenue Campus in the Brown Lecture Hall. The theme is "Promoting Racial Equality in Education."

The forum will address a variety of strategies for promoting racial equality in education. It will be led by four panelists: Jeffrey Booker, Larry Feldman, Rebecca Fudge and Gladys Peeples-Burks.

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Keishawn Branscumb, 9, of Benton Harbor listens to the Lake Michigan College Concert Choir perform while sitting with his grandparents, Will and Dorothy Branscumb, during the 2017 Martin Luther King Jr. Community Breakfast in the Mendal Center of Lake Michigan College in Benton Township.