



For Immediate Release
Jan. 6, 2016

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Winners announced for state MLK awards

Commemorative celebration Jan. 14 in downtown Columbus

COLUMBUS — Eight Ohioans will be recognized for their efforts to advance nonviolent social change at the 31st annual Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Celebration. The free event, sponsored by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission, will be held at noon Thursday, Jan. 14 at Trinity Episcopal Church, 125 E. Broad St., Columbus.

The awards and their recipients are as follows:

Governor's Humanitarian Award criteria: *The recipient of this award has acted independently of associations and organizations. The recipient has given his or her time and service freely to those in need without question and often without recognition. This award honors quiet soldiers who promote the welfare of humanity and elimination of pain and suffering through their own selfless service.*

Winner: Pastor Dianna Shurelds, Lima, has been serving the Lima community as an unsung hero for more than 30 years. An excellent cook, for years she has made home-cooked meals and then delivered them to the homeless. Feeding the homeless has since become a ministry of her church, the Church of the Living God in Lima. As a result of her help, many of the homeless individuals she has helped are no longer homeless and are thriving members of the community. Some have joined her church and are part of the mission to help feed the homeless. In addition, as a probation officer for Allen County Juvenile Court, she mentors youth and helps them find better ways to deal with their problems.

Community Building Award criteria: *The recipient selected in this category has made significant contributions toward building a sense of unity among Ohio citizens. The recipient has demonstrated the ability to build safer communities through various activities and programs that help to revitalize areas and make our communities a more wholesome and desirable place for living, learning and loving. The recipient has used Dr. King's vision of nonviolent social change in his efforts to successfully bring people from diverse backgrounds together to build a better community.*

Winner: Pastor Mark Ford, Akron, began his preaching ministry at age 17. He has been a community leader in the cities where he has served, promoting racial harmony

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and denominational unity. He was one of eight founding members of the Love Akron Network whose mission is to call Christian leaders of the greater Akron area to pray, unite and collaborate in ministry for the advancement of spiritual and social transformation in their communities. The network began when Ford and others held a prayer event in 1995. Over the years hundreds of pastors and ministry leaders in Summit County have discovered each other through the Love Akron Network, which is now a resource, communication clearinghouse and connection point for more than 250 ministers and ministry leaders. Ford has served as the full-time executive director of the Love Akron Network since 2005.

Cultural Awareness Award criteria: *The recipient selected in this category has demonstrated an appreciation for diversity and evidenced skill in building and maintaining harmonious cross-cultural relationships. The recipient's achievements foster Dr. King's vision of unity among people of diverse cultural backgrounds.*

Winner: Greg Merkel, Lima, has been mentoring youth preparing for the Lima regional contest of the Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest for seven years, including two years as the program coordinator. He does so through volunteering with a program called "I Am Making a Difference," which prepares youth in grades kindergarten through 12 for the Lima regional contest. Participants also perform community service, such as reciting their contest essays at nursing homes. His three children participated in the program and he continues to help other youth.

Economic Opportunity Award criteria: *The recipient in this category may be an organization or individual who seeks to improve the quality of life for its citizens in economically challenged areas through economic incentive programs. The recipient has demonstrated accomplishments in one or more of the following areas: workforce development programs; upgrading skills of existing workforce; infrastructure improvements; creation of community partnerships; housing assistance programs; energy efficiency programs; environmental programs; encouragement of new business startups; or ability to take advantage of state and federal aid to provide economic opportunity.*

Winner: Melinda Carter, Columbus, has dedicated her career to serving the marginalized and underserved. A civil rights advocate, Carter became the director of the Office of Equal Business Opportunity for the City of Columbus in 1997. During her nine-year tenure, the city's utilization of minority- and women-owned firms quadrupled. After serving the City of Columbus, she had her own business and then she was named the equal employment opportunity coordinator for the State of Ohio and deputy director of the Equal Opportunity Division of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services in 2009. While working for the state, she was elected to serve on the inaugural board of the National Association of Minority/Women Business Enterprise directors. For two years, she served on the board of this organization created to promote business development among minority-owned, women-owned and disadvantaged business enterprises. Carter returned to her former position with the

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City of Columbus in 2011. She is committed to the creation of a comprehensive inclusion program that is meaningful and sustainable.

Educational Excellence Award criteria: *The recipient selected in this category recognizes the personal commitment and example that King provided for academic achievement. Therefore, the recipient has demonstrated a personal commitment to scholarship and/or attainment of educational goals despite significant barriers or obstacles. The recipient also has demonstrated outstanding accomplishments in eradicating systemic barriers that impede the attainment of academic excellence.*

Winner: Robert Decatur, Columbus. An educator for more than 26 years, Decatur has assisted with tutoring youth to help them excel in their coursework and obtain scholarships. He has taken many students under his wing. He currently serves as director for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Program at The Ohio State University. His main duties include overseeing the Morrill Scholars Program, one of the nation's largest and premier diversity scholarships. He also oversees the office's Campus Change Program, which provides underrepresented regional campus and transfer students with academic, personal and career support services that facilitate student success as well as a seamless transition to the main campus.

Health Equity and Awareness Award criteria: *The recipient selected in this category offers exemplary community outreach and educational programs that serve an underserved population in the state. These services increase the accessibility of health care for the underserved while providing a high quality of customer service.*

Winner: Doni Miller, Toledo, has more than 25 years of experience in health care, spending the majority of her time as a senior administrator at what is now the University of Toledo Medical Center and community health centers. She currently serves as chief executive officer of Neighborhood Health Association in Toledo, the largest community health center in northwest Ohio. Outside of work, Miller is a supporter of women's shelters and minority inclusion.

Social Justice Award criteria: *The recipients selected in this category have made significant contributions to achieving justice for individuals or communities, including contributions made through the legal, legislative and governmental systems as they apply to the more vulnerable elements of our society.*

Winners: Dr. Joe Coffey, Hudson, and Dr. John Tyus, Reynoldsburg

Dr. Joe Coffey is lead pastor of Christ Community Chapel, which has campuses in Hudson, Aurora, Highland Square and Stow. The church also operates Restoration Chapel at Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility, a facility in Highland Hills operated by the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Each Restoration Chapel

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service attracts about 60 participants. In addition, the church has donated about \$3.5 million during the past 3.5 years to justice and mercy ministries; has aided the rescuing of children from human trafficking; and has introduced racial reconciliation events.

Dr. John Tyus created a mentoring program, called The I.D. Movement, for fatherless African-American males. The I.D. Movement is based at World Conquerors through Jesus Christ, the church on the west side of Columbus where Tyus serves as assistant pastor. Tyus also lectures at schools, churches and other organizations, sharing information for mothers of young men as well as discussing the need for proper male role models.

The Jan. 14 event also will feature speeches from the following winners of the 2015 Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest held last April: Ezell Matchett, now a third-grader, Lima; Marlin Yarborough, now a sixth-grader, Groveport; Bre'Anna Walker, now an eighth-grader, Columbus; and Holli Warthem, now an 11th-grader, Lima.

The commission is housed in the Equal Opportunity Division of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services, which provides centralized support for state agencies.

For more information about the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission, visit das.ohio.gov/mlk.