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Strickland honors Ohioans at MLK celebration

Columbus — Seven Ohio individuals and organizations were recognized today at the 24th annual Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Celebration for their efforts to advance social change.

The event, which was sponsored by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission, was held at the Capitol Theatre in the Vern Riffe Center for Government and the Arts, 77 S. High St., Columbus.

The speakers included Governor Ted Strickland.

Strickland said, "I congratulate the Ohioans recognized here today for their community service efforts, which embody Dr. King's vision and commitment to humanity. This celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life reminds us that irrespective of age, or race, or gender, or economic class, we have a moral duty to serve our fellow man and in that service we will find our own greatest power."

Other speakers included the winners of the 2008 Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest.

The Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission presented awards to the following individuals and organizations:

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: Annie Hall, Youngstown — For many decades, Hall has remained a true public servant to the Mahoning County community through her dedication to a local food bank, volunteering with neighborhood crime prevention programs and aiding with local litter control clean-up efforts.

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 serve the community beyond his or her regular job responsibilities. Community service activities can help participants shape their character, increase self-confidence, develop civic responsibility, eliminate socio-economic barriers, and build bridges of unity and understanding among races.

Winner: Columbus Housing Partnership — Before the Columbus Housing Partnership became involved, the North of Broad community, which is located in the King-Lincoln District of Columbus, was



a neighborhood known for its deteriorating homes, trash, graffiti and drug paraphernalia. Through its partnerships with community residents, the City of Columbus, the Columbus Police Department and service-based organizations, Columbus Housing Partnership helped revitalize the neighborhood by building and renovating homes, completing projects to make the neighborhood more environmentally friendly and helping residents become involved in programs to achieve a cleaner, safer community.

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. King's approach was founded on the belief that we are all created equal by God. The recipient's achievements foster King's vision of unity among people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Winner: Alice Mae Saunders, Lancaster — Since the late 1960s, Saunders has been a key figure in bringing cultural awareness to the forefront in Lancaster through her community activism. She helped found the Black Interest Group of Lancaster, whose goal was to address issues facing African-Americans and other minority groups, as well as the annual celebration in Lancaster commemorating King. The celebration, which often includes a march for peace, has been held for the past 25 years. She has served on many community boards, including the board of the Community Action Council, where she was instrumental in bringing the Head Start program to Lancaster. In addition, Saunders has worked with the Fairfield County Sheriff's Department on issues between African-Americans and law enforcement. She also worked with officials in the Lancaster City Schools system to address the issues of gangs, drug abuse, discrimination and racism.

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 the ability to take advantage of state and federal aid to provide economic opportunity.

Winner: Stephen Tucker, Cincinnati — After being released from prison, Tucker completed a job-training program through the Urban League of Greater Cincinnati. A short time later, Tucker was hired by the Urban League, becoming a driving force in helping the league's re-entry program achieve the rank of second best in the United States in helping ex-offenders successfully secure employment. He has had a profound impact on ex-offenders seeking employment by personally assisting more than 600 ex-offenders obtain employment during the past three years.

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: Cincinnati Youth Collaborative — Through its mentoring and College Access programs, the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative has helped raise the high school graduation and college attendance rates for students in Cincinnati Public Schools. Since its founding in 1987, Cincinnati Youth Collaborative has assisted more than 100,000 youths prepare to graduate high school and enter post-

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secondary educational institutions by collaborating with Cincinnati Public Schools, volunteers and other organizations. An evaluation of its College Access Program found that 97 percent of seniors in the program graduated from high school, and 90 percent applied to college.

Health Equity and Awareness Award criteria: The recipient in this category offers community outreach and educational programs for an under-served population in the state. Such services increase the accessibility of health care for the under-served while providing a high quality of customer service. Critical issues in achieving health equity and awareness include provisions for drug treatment, HIV testing, health screenings, prenatal care, pediatric care and prescription programs for the uninsured/underinsured.

Winner: Mary Jenkins, Columbus — While in treatment for breast cancer, Jenkins knew she wanted to aid and empower others who were in similar situations so she founded the non-profit organization Christians Overcoming Cancer, which empowers and provides emotional and financial support services to individuals undergoing treatment for cancer. She also promotes self-health awareness to help people, particularly low-income individuals and minority groups, have potential health issues diagnosed early.

Social Justice Award: The recipient selected in this category has made significant contributions toward achieving justice for individuals or communities. The recipient may have made contributions through the legal, legislative and governmental systems as they apply to the more vulnerable elements of our society. The recipient has engaged in activities that embrace King's commitment to non-violence while fostering social justice.

Winner: Charles See, Cleveland — See co-founded Community Re-entry, an ecumenically sponsored community justice ministry. He has helped give ex-offenders opportunities to make a positive impact on the lives of others. For example, when elderly and disabled residents of Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority buildings were frightened to leave their apartments due to high crime in the area, See dispatched a team of ex-offenders to escort them safely to their doctor's appointments and errands. The teams of ex-offenders also were instrumental in helping See improve attendance at East Technical High School from the lowest in Cleveland to the highest. Along with See, the team of ex-offenders visited residences and talked with teens and parents about the importance of school attendance.

The event also featured winners from the 2008 Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest, which also is sponsored by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission. The winners of this April contest for students in grades kindergarten through 12 were as follows: Senior division (grades nine through 12) — Destin Tevis, Columbus; junior division (grades six through eight) — Alexander White, Columbus; intermediate division (grades four and five) — Bakari Brown, Columbus; primary division (grades one through three) — Amir Idris, South Euclid; and kindergarten division — Kennedy Gary, Columbus.

The commission conducts the MLK celebration with assistance from the Equal Opportunity Division of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services. Under the leadership of Director Hugh Quill, the department provides centralized support for state agencies.