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State commission honors Martin Luther King Jr.

by Charlotte Ferrell Smith
Daily Mail staff

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The recently appointed Martin Luther King Jr. State Holiday Commission scrambled to put together today's celebration in just five weeks' time.

Carolyn Stuart, commission chairwoman, said the new group is energetic and dedicated but has not had much time to do anything but plan today's schedule of speakers and activities.

However, the commission plans to meet more regularly in the future to discuss goals, she said.

"We are energetic and look forward to continuing," she said.

Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin issued an executive order to re-establish the Martin Luther King Jr. State Holiday Commission to replace an earlier order that expired on June 30, 2013.

The governor appoints members of the commission from among those who have shown interest, Stuart said.

The members are from various walks of life and come from throughout the state, she said.

"We were notified the second week of November, met for the first time on Dec. 2 and here we are," she said. "We are commissioned to provide the state holiday celebration. The newly re-established commission will look at ways to continue that effort throughout the year."

Members of the group take their job seriously.

"We honor the life and legacy of Dr. King as we continue to fight for equality of all citizens of West Virginia," she said.

Gov. Tomblin said, "It is important we honor the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the principles in which he believed and struggled to bring to fruition.

"I truly believe the commission's planning, development and promotion of this holiday to ensure the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. continues to inspire all West Virginians."

The Martin Luther King Jr. State Holiday Commission plans events to commemorate the birthday and achievements of King. The group also encourages governmental agencies, educational institutions, civic organizations and the general public to plan activities as well for observance of the holiday.

Aside from serving as commission chair, Stuart is executive director of the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs that was established in 2012. She hears about minority issues and works with agencies to provide better health and business opportunities for minorities.

Activities in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day begin at 10:30 a.m. today at Asbury United Methodist Church, located at 501 Elizabeth St. in Charleston's East End. An ecumenical service will include speakers of various faiths.

Music will be by the Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus and Appalachian Children's Choir.

A bell ringing ceremony will follow at the state Capitol Complex North Portico at 12:30 p.m. The commission will host the student essay and community service awards program at the Culture Center beginning at 1 p.m. A musical performance at 3 p.m. by "Unity in the Community" will feature a choir, steel drum ensemble and dancers.

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