

On January 14, The Whatcom Human Rights Task Force and Whatcom Community College (WCC) will present the 14th annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Conference at the Syre Center at WCC. This event is titled “Reawakening Dreams, Empowering Communities”. It is entirely free to the public and is a collaboration between WCC, Woodring College of Education at Western Washington University (WWU), and numerous community organizations. Registration begins at 9:30 am.

Dr. King said, “True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.” It is with that sentiment that the conference is organized to reawaken the dreams that continue to be the legacy Dr. King left all citizens of this nation. His dream was of a more just and humane world. As a citizen of this country, I have been overwhelmed when I travel overseas to see his portrait hung in homes and offices and he is the American who is most often quoted, particularly by people who believe in the values of freedom, democracy and liberty for all citizens.

The workshops were chosen to empower our communities to work toward the values they hold dear for this country. Our commitment to human rights and justice for all is foremost. To encourage that end, there will be clock hours available for teachers, free parking at WCC and entertainment at the breaks!

Besides the many and varied workshops that will be a part of the day, we are especially proud to have two excellent keynote speakers this year. Professor Dexter Gordon will be our first speaker at 10:00 a.m.. There are two quotes from Dr. King which typifies Prof. Gordon. The first is, “No person has the right to rain on your dreams” and the second is “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend.”

Dr. Dexter Gordon is a Distinguished Professor from University of Puget Sound (UPS). He is bringing together years of experience as an educator, preacher, scholar, and community advocate whose vision of comprehensive community development is grounded in equality and justice for all. He educates students and teachers at all levels to think critically about race and to act to eliminate racism. It has been said of Dr. Gordon that he approaches leadership as an art form, he is always working with other leaders – and he is always growing new leaders.

Again Dr. King stated, “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Our afternoon keynote speaker exemplifies this. Mr. Jeff Robinson was chosen as King County Bar Association “Lawyer of the Year” in 2003. He is a member and past president of the Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the 2004 winner of William O. Douglas Award. He was selected as a member of the John Adams Project, a small group of lawyers chosen by the ACLU and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers to help in the representation of one of the “High Value Detainees” held at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station and charged with capital murder for alleged assistance in the 9-11 attacks in New York City. Mr. Robinson is the co-winner of the 2009 Washington State ACLU Civil Libertarian Award.

We welcome all members of our community to this conference and in particular should remember the quote from the anthropologist, Margaret Mead who stated, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has”.

Barbara Z. Rofkar, whrtf board member and chair, MLK committee