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Timeline Honoring Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. to be Unveiled

Feb-23-2005

Jeff Collier believes that Martin Luther King Jr. deserves to be honored with more than a portrait in the Eastern Illinois University student union that bears the slain civil rights leader's name.

"I feel like, years later, we can still expand the tribute," Collier said. "It's just a portrait of Martin Luther King. It doesn't necessarily reflect the contributions that he made."

That's why Collier, president of EIU's Black Student Union, has helped coordinate the effort to add a timeline of King's life to the student union.

The timeline is to be unveiled during a ceremony at 6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 26, in the Bridge Lounge of the union. President Lou Hencken and Collier are slated to speak.

"I think people have to look at Martin Luther King Jr. as more than a person that existed and (a reason) we take a Monday off," Collier said. "I think we have to take seriously the contributions he made to the United States."

Collier was inspired to spearhead the project last year while taking a civil rights movement class. At that time, he was a member of the Student Senate, where he and Caleb Judy, former student body president, successfully encouraged the Student Senate to pass a resolution in support of the timeline.

A fund-raiser by student groups netted \$535 for the project, but the main goal was to convince the administration that there was student interest in the timeline, Collier said.

The remainder of the \$8,000 cost was paid for by the student union, using funds secured by Shirley Stewart, who was then vice president for student affairs.

The 30-foot-by-4-foot timeline lists significant events in King's life, including his birth, school years and civil rights movement highlights. Pictures and various quotes from King are included as well.

"The creation of the tribute is the result of the hard work of many people, and they are to be commended for it," said Judy, who is now serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa. "It was selfless work completed only for the education of everyone that walks through the doors of the Martin Luther King Jr. Union. There was a reason that our union was named after Dr. King. The tribute will help those people understand that reason."

The timeline was designed by university photographer Bev Cruse, who did much of the work on her own time. Other volunteers helped with proofreading and checking facts, she said.

Cruse was a student when the union was named after King in 1971, and she said the timeline will help educate current students about the importance of King's contributions.

"He's quite an icon in our American history," Cruse said. "This will be a constant reminder of that. I'm just pleased to have been a part of it."