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MLK celebration honors Ohioans

Columbus — Four Ohio individuals and organizations were recognized today at the 26th 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, Columbus.

The speakers included Director Robert Blair of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services.

"Today, we need the kind of passion that Dr. King gave his country in the 1960s. We need people to get involved again in civic affairs, to help see a wrong and try to make it right," Blair said.

"Governor Kasich mentioned this in his inaugural address on Monday. He said, 'My only passion in all of this has been to lift Ohio, to make us competitive again, and to create jobs for our families. Because when our families have jobs, they have hope. They have dreams. And they have strength. It is my only purpose and my only passion.'"

Also at the event, the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission presented awards to the following Ohioans:

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: Eva Crawford, Columbus — Eva Crawford uses her faith and skills as a nurse to serve others. Her service includes organizing a group to serve Meals-on-Wheels to residents of Mount Vernon Plaza apartments; working with Friends of Art for Community Enrichment (FACE), which offers cultural awareness opportunities for young people; being active in her church's project to aid Haitian children as well as her church's clothing bank and layette ministry, which makes layettes for new mothers in the church. Her informal church involvement includes befriending members who are lonely and isolated. Her other activities include serving on the Church Women United and American Baptist Trustee boards, visiting residents of an assisted living facility and serving as a member of the Columbus Metropolitan Church Council, which promotes ecumenical and racial equality.

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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: Easton Community Foundation, Columbus — Easton Community Foundation is committed to working closely with community leaders and local and regional charities to build stronger, more cohesive and collaborative communities. The foundation operates the Change for Charity Meter Program, which gives Easton Town Center shoppers the opportunity to donate money to local charities by feeding parking meters, and the Cornerstone Event Partnerships, which raise funds to support Columbus institutions focused on family health and advocacy. The events, which are hosted on Easton property, are an Evening of Hope, which raises community awareness and financial support for the Center for Child and Family Advocacy; Celebration for Life, which raises funds to support the James Cancer Hospital Fund for Life; and Once Upon a Night, which raises funds to support Nationwide Children's Hospital's effort to provide the highest quality of care regardless of a patient's inability to pay.

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: Janis Feters, Columbus — During her more than 26 years with the YMCA of Central Ohio, Feters has continued to learn new skills to develop new programs to meet community needs. In the 1980s, she developed and implemented the Black Achievers Program which recruited and trained African American adult mentors who were matched with African American youths. To respond to the needs of working parents, in the 1990s Feters oversaw the expansion of after-school programs from four programs to more than 50 programs. In 1992, under her leadership, the YMCA opened its first full-day, full-year preschool program in a Columbus City Schools facility. Then in the 2000s, she took on the youth obesity epidemic, collaborating with The Ohio State University to provide nutrition education activities in the YMCA's after-school programs and ensuring that food served in the YMCA's preschool and after-school sites was as healthy as possible. In 2001, Feters was part of a team that addressed the issue of students missing school as a result of suspension. The YMCA, Columbus Police Department and Columbus City Schools partnered to provide positive alternatives for students who were suspended or truant from school. The program has served more than 12,000 youth through the PALS (Positive Alternatives for Learning) program and more than 4,500 youth through truancy centers.

Health and Equity Award criteria: The recipient in this category offers community outreach and educational programs for an under-served population in the state. Such services

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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: Tim Anderson, Columbus — Tim Anderson began addressing diabetes health education after he was diagnosed with the disease about 10 years ago. His advocacy also is due in part to five friends and colleagues who died from complications of diabetes within the first 18 months of his diagnosis. His advocacy has included development of the first diabetes lifestyle center in Ohio, which was operated by the Central Ohio Diabetes Association on the near eastside of Columbus, an area with the state's highest rate of diabetes and highest rate of complications from the disease. Anderson also created the city-wide program known as Walking in the Neighborhood, which encouraged area residents to form walking clubs. Supported by a grant from Abbott Labs and the Ohio Department of Health, the program also included diabetes education, fitness seminars and cooking demonstrations. More than 800 people have participated in the 15 walking clubs. Anderson also developed the In My Backyard Health and Wellness Program designed to assist neighbors in his community to adopt and sustain a healthy lifestyle. The free program, which is conducted in Anderson's backyard and is open to the public, offers diabetes and wellness education, physical activities and cooking demonstrations.

Today's event also featured the following winners from the 2010 Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest, which also is sponsored by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission. The winners of this April contest who spoke today were John Merkel, Lima; Taylor Wynne, South Euclid; and Micaiah Moore, Cincinnati.

Event attendees were given 2011 calendars produced by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission. The calendar features historical information about King's life and legacy, including his many visits to Ohio. For information about obtaining a calendar, please visit das.ohio.gov/eod/mlk.

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