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Two Cincinnatians to receive MLK Commission awards

COLUMBUS - Two Cincinnatians will be recognized Thursday by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission during its 36th annual Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Celebration. The pair is among seven individuals and one organization to be honored for their work to serve others and lift the oppressed in communities across Ohio. Typically held at Trinity Episcopal Church in downtown Columbus, this year's event was prerecorded and can be viewed at das.ohio.gov/mlk beginning Thursday at 11:45 a.m.

"As governor, I believe that we must keep the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King of equality, unity, and justice at the forefront of everything we do," said Governor Mike DeWine "It is a privilege to recognize the outstanding service and achievements of Ohioans whose deeds and actions are consistent with Dr. King's teachings of non-violent social and economic change."

The 12-member [commission](#) advocates Dr. King's principles of nonviolent change and the pursuit of racial, social and economic justice, and annually presents the awards in January leading up to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

"It is an honor to serve on this commission dedicated to keeping Dr. King's dream alive in Ohio," said McKinley Brown, chair of the commission. "After a year of such great social change and needed conversations about where we stand in advancing toward equity and understanding, I am especially pleased to recognize these Ohioans who are advocating for a better future."

Klarke Griffith will receive the Youth: Capturing the Vision of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Award, which recognizes young people who exemplify leadership, nonviolence, commitment to excellence and interracial cooperation as well as demonstrate an adherence to one or more of Dr. King's Six Principles of Nonviolence.

Griffith is a student at The Ohio State University who has become a community leader and activist in the wake of this year's racial justice movement. She was the lead organizer of the June 1 protest seeking systematic change for Black lives and people of color in Cincinnati and across the U.S. She is an active organizer with Black Lives Matter and also is involved with the groups Cincinnati Black United Front and Leaders of the Free World that advocate for police accountability and systemic change in law enforcement.

Griffith has been involved in calls for a refresh of the Cincinnati Police collaborative agreement, originally created in 2002 as part of an effort to improve police-community relations. She collected hundreds of demands, proposed solutions, and questions to engage the community on the change they want to see.

Griffith also was vital to creating a strong social media presence for Cincinnati Black United Front and Leaders of the Free World and is the creative director of the Instagram campaign Womanist Wednesday, which focuses on creating a more feminist future.

“As a young adult, Klarke has not taken her education and the sacrifices made her to get where she is lightly and has understood the value of community and sacrifice and leadership. Klarke unified a force of many and created an impactful voice for all,” said her nominator.

Sheryl Rajbhandari will receive the Economic Opportunity Award, which recognizes individuals, municipalities, businesses or other organizations that seek to improve the quality of life for citizens in economically challenged areas through economic incentive programs.

Rajbhandari is the founder and Executive Director of Heartfelt Tidbits, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting refugees and recent immigrants living in Southwestern Ohio by facilitating integration and self-sufficiency through education, cultural, and employment-enhancing programming.

Rajbhandari founded the organization in 2008 to fill gaps left by the short-term aid of refugee resettlement agencies. Recognizing the transition to the United States can take much longer, her goal was to offer a ‘longer welcome’ to Cincinnati by helping refugees a ‘tidbit’ at a time.

Understanding that economic stability is one of the major factors that helps integration, Sheryl offers numerous forms of assistance from job readiness to community gardening and sewing classes. Her nominator noted that Rajbhandari's programming has helped refugees and other immigrants to attain higher education and start their own businesses. Her rental assistance also has helped families stay in their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Sheryl Rajbhandari's commitment to helping immigrants and refugees become economically independent speaks to Dr. King's principle that those who have the opportunity and privilege should not be sitting back while others go hungry.”

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services provides administrative support to the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission.

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