



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The history behind celebrating MLK in Alexandria

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Image: Martin Luther King, Jr. Poster Competition, Office of Historic Alexandria.

This April marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Like many cities and towns across the nation, Alexandria is celebrating the life and work of King throughout January. Some annual city events include:

- The 22nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Staff Celebration on Jan. 10. The keynote speaker will be Susan Bro, mother of civil rights activist Heather Heyer, the Charlottesville resident killed by a protester in August 2017.

- The 45th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Program on Jan. 15. It will feature welcome remarks by Mayor Allison Silberberg. Veteran news anchor Maureen Bunyan will be the keynote speaker.

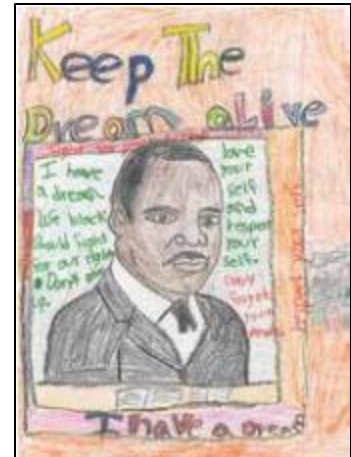
An event many may not be aware of is the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Poster Exhibition, an interactive program for children in Alexandria City Public Schools. It allows them to learn about King and his dedication to service, as well as allowing their teachers to relate it to a current event or topic. Between 50 and 100 entries are submitted each year.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Poster Exhibition started as a contest in 1990. Created by the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, Inc., the contest highlights the art work of ACPS students. The Society is the friends group for the Alexandria Black History Museum (formerly known as the Alexandria Black History Resource Center).

Under the leadership of two memorable Society presidents, Harry Burke and Carlton A. Funn Sr., the contest grew from a small exhibit and program held at the Alexandria Black History Museum, to a larger exhibition held in the Vola Lawson Lobby of city hall in January and February of each year. Not only does the MLK Poster Exhibition honor King, it allows ACPS students to have their artwork displayed in city hall for all of Black History Month. In addition to the exhibition, a formal program is held in city hall on Martin Luther King Day. In 2013, the contest became a memorial exhibition honoring Funn.

The poster exhibition's annual theme is always drawn from the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. This organization, founded in 1915 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, has as its mission "to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community."

One of Woodson's legacies is Negro History Week, created in 1926. It is the forerunner to today's Black History Month, which figures prominently in ASALH's mission. The 2018 national theme is "African Americans in Times of War." The City of Alexandria's related theme is "Serving the People, Serving America, Serving Alexandria." It allows students to honor parents, teachers, and friends who have helped





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

to make their communities a better place. ACPS art teachers ask their students to incorporate into their artwork not only African American history, but their personal family history.

The program is free and open to the public. It will be held in city council chambers on Jan. 15 from 1 to 3 p.m. The artwork is on display in the Vola Lawson Lobby from Jan. 15 to Feb. 28, 2018.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.