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Dr. King, and other trailblazers, have a lasting place in Westm

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By Kevin E. Dayhoff

Jan. 15, 1929 is the birthday of one of the world's best-known advocates of non-violent social change strategies, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

We all know of King's contribution to our nation, but I would wager not many know of his near-connection to our town.

Dr. Ira Zepp, retired McDaniel College professor, tells me that King was scheduled to deliver a lecture at Western Maryland College (WMC) on March 10, 1968.

Other pressing matters caused Dr. King to postpone. Before he was able to re-schedule, he was killed on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.

Even though he was not able to visit Westminster, Dr. King's spirit did, as WMC (now McDaniel) was an impetus in helping desegregate Westminster.

WMC was the summer home of the Baltimore Colts from 1953-1971. The dynamic of having African-American athletes in town was one important impetus in the desegregation of Westminster.

On April 7, 1964, the state Legislature enacted the Maryland Public Accommodations Law - prohibiting discrimination in public facilities, such as restaurants and movie theatres.

In the following year, Carroll County persevered in efforts to desegregate.

Many factors and community leaders contributed to accomplishing the work of Dr. King in Carroll County from the mid-1950s to the mid-60s.

As part of the WMC movement, Professor William David was, reportedly, rather assertive with then-WMC President Dr. Ensor about the issue of racial diversity at WMC in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Drs. Zepp and Del Palmer were also positive voices in the racial diversity initiative at WMC. (Dr. Zepp came to campus as a professor in 1963.)

At this time, there was a growing feeling at WMC that it was important for the campus to be racially diverse.

According to Zepp, the first black student, Burton Mack, was admitted to WMC in 1961. However after being admitted, he chose not to attend.

In an article entitled, "When the Wall Cracked," published in campus periodical The Hill, in February 1990, Dr. William David writes: "The first and most courageous act leading to the integration of WMC was a statement by Dr. Charles Crain, professor of religion, in a faculty meeting in 1955."

Dr. David's article states that a student by the name of Raphael Mayamona was WMC's first black graduate. Mayamona, he says, was from the Congo and had been attending high school in Massachusetts. According to Dr. David, "(Mayamona) applied and was accepted and entered in the fall of 1963."

Another student, Charles Seabron, was accepted and began studies at WMC in September 1963.

Dr. David writes "In September 1963 É we had two black undergraduate students on the campus. Charles Seabron was well-received by most students and was soon elected president of the freshman class. However, he É dropped out at the end of his (first) year."

Dr. Zepp said Seabron transferred to Morgan, and in the end, the first African-Americans to graduate were Charles Victor McTeer and Charles Smothers in 1969.

"In the process they, like Raphael Mayamona, did much for us," said Zepp. "for which we owe them gratitude."

From those days WMC-McDaniel, under the leadership of President Dr. Joan Coley and others such as Drs. Ethan Seidel and Phil Sayre, have continued to build the numbers of community leaders benefiting from a racially diverse campus.

Former Prince George's County Executive Wayne Curry, who graduated from WMC in 1972, is among those who have left a mark of excellence and have continued on to be leaders in the greater community.

We all share a dream of being judged by our abilities and not the color of our skin.

Many great leaders have gone before us to lead the way, but the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King will always be with us and the work of making sure that everyone is always welcome in our community is never over.

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