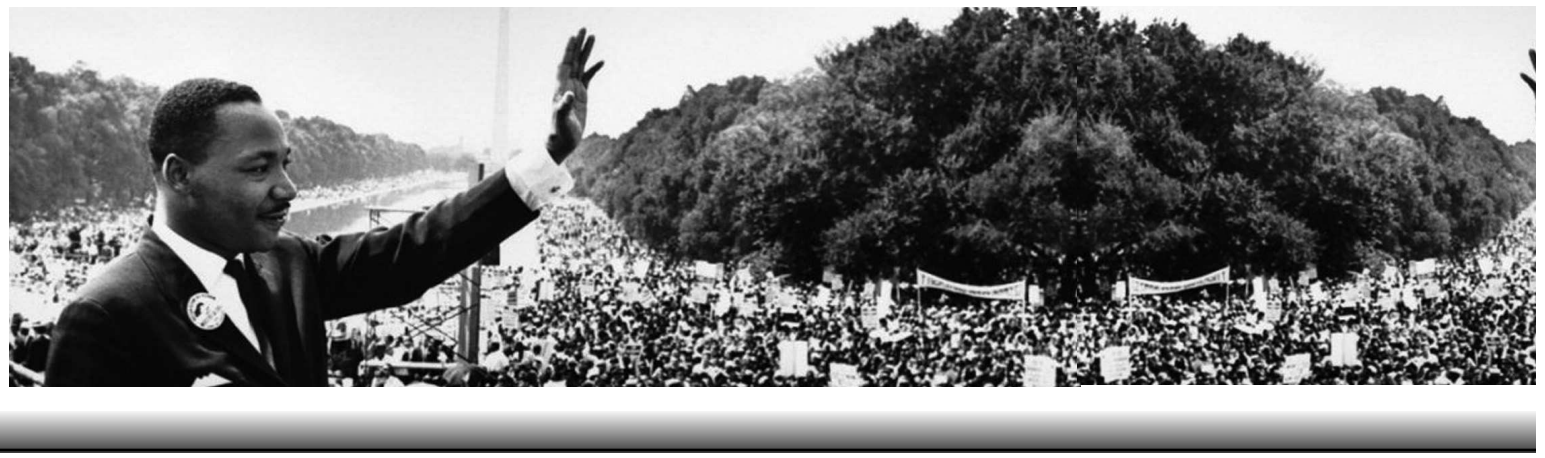


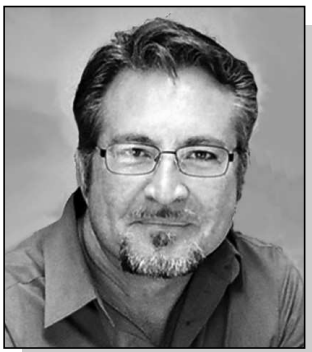
One of our hopes as a community newspaper, in addition to informing our readers, is to inspire conversation about the things that matter to us as a community and as Americans. To this end, we have devoted this special section of today's edition to Martin Luther King Jr., offering perspectives on his message and continuing legacy. What follows are columns from local writers, letters from readers and an editorial recounting of a personal experience while living in Atlanta that is equal parts inspiration and regret.

— Ned Hickson, Editor



Opinion

Sharing the love of Rufus Valentine



As I've mentioned before, I lived in the South for 10 years, with six of those years spent in the suburbs of Atlanta. In the early 1990s, I was a restaurant chef operating in one of Georgia's largest shopping malls — three stories of glass, sale banners and merchants spanning six football fields' worth of mall space.

As you can imagine, I've dealt with as many personalities as there are seats in a 280-capacity dining room. The fact that Rufus Valentine dug such a deep groove in my memory should tell you a little something about the man's character.

I'd like to tell you more.

The first time I saw Rufus Valentine was during the Braves' heyday in February of 1992, when all of Atlanta was anticipating the spring — and a run at the World Series. Essentially, you could be com-

pletely naked; but as long as you had a Braves cap on you were considered properly attired by most Atlantans.

So, when Rufus appeared in his red tights, heart-shaped wings and Braves cap at the west entrance of the Lenox Square mall, like most people, I assumed he was there to express his love for Atlanta's baseball team.

At least until I saw the bow and arrows. But even then, I could see that he was harmless. The arrows in his quiver were tipped with foam rubber — red, of course — and in the shape of hearts.

Considering the date, I made the connection and realized we had a Braves-loving Cupid on our hands.

I'd dealt with worse things.

The complaints started soon after we opened. Since our restaurant was situated closest to the mall entrance, we got the brunt of unhappy mall dwellers.

"Hey, there's some guy shooting people with rubber arrows out there," one of them said, brandishing the arrow in question and rubbing his cheek.

With security nowhere to be

found, I decided to settle the matter myself and strode out the door — and was immediately tagged.

"Got you! Spread the love, brother," Rufus said, as if he'd tossed me a box of chocolates instead of nailing me with a

truding from either side of the chair back, he drew more than a few stares.

Handing him a soda, I noticed that his black hands were worn and callused. His fingernails had dried to the point of splitting. He gave me

From the Editor's Desk

NED HICKSON

rubber arrow.

"Excuse me, but you'll have to stop with the arrows. My customers are complaining," I said.

In that same instant, he plugged a passerby who turned and gave me a dirty look, spouting something about restaurant promotions getting out of hand.

A sudden ebb in the shopping current allowed me to grab his attention. "Hey, it's almost noon. How about lunch on me?"

"What'cha got?"

"Come in and find out," I said, ushering him inside and up to the counter in hopes of containing him through the lunch rush. Sitting there at one of the stools, his wings pro-

an appreciative nod and sipped, then blurted "fettuccini Alfredo."

He laid the menu down and pointed to the item, as if I wouldn't know it otherwise.

"Coming right up," I said, and took the menu. As I turned to ring in his order, I saw him reach for his quiver.

"Hey," I said, one hand on his drawing arm. "Here's the deal. No matchmaking until after lunch."

He studied me for a moment, then set his bow on the counter. "I'm no matchmaker. I'm just tryin' to spread the love — one brother, one sister at a time."

"That's a nice sentiment; just don't do it in here, OK?" I said, and released his arm.

I think everyone has said things they wish they hadn't. In the top 10 of my own regrettable phrases, that one ranks right up there. First, because of my tactics to control him. Second, because he called me on it.

And third, because I wouldn't get the chance to take it back.

With the smell of parmesan and cream sauce in the air, this obviously hungry man stood from the counter, grabbed his bow and quiver, and left the counter.

"People need love more than I needed fettuccini Alfredo," he said, and exited the restaurant. When he kept going, I considered myself lucky.

He could become someone else's headache.

Unfortunately for Rufus Valentine, that's exactly what happened.

When my shift ended, it was near dusk. Along the sidewalks, automated lamps had started humming to life. As I approached the parking tower, I noticed flashes of red and blue spilling from the shadows of the underground level where I was parked.

The closer I got, the more patrol cars I saw. At the edge of the drive, yellow crime scene tape had been strung. Taking a spot among a crowd of onlookers, I saw a white sheet and, protruding from beneath it, the callused hand of Rufus Valentine.

Next to him, his wings lay in a crumpled pile.

I later learned that Rufus Valentine — born Rufus Jones in 1936 — had left the mall that day and taken his message to the parking garage. It was there that he encountered a street gang and attempted to "spread the love."

He met the faces of prejudice and hatred instead.

With the approach of Martin Luther King Day, he always comes to mind.

And, also, no small measure of guilt. Had I left him alone to do his work, or brought him lunch instead, things might have turned out differently.

Even though he's no longer here to sling his arrows, I hope we can take his message to heart and spread the love: One brother, one sister at a time.

Write Ned Hickson at nhickson@thesiuslawnews.com or P.O. Box 10, Florence, Ore. 97439.

LETTERS

WHAT WOULD DR. KING TWEET?

Even as recently as the fall of 2003, we discovered that a Florence public education event concerning Martin Luther King could draw the interest of federal authorities.

We had gathered at Old Town Coffee by the old Port Authority offices. Inside, we had organized guest speakers, information and a nationally-known musician and guitarist, Dave Lippman, with his honed political-social lyrical bent. He had come to Florence via Greyhound, having been blacklisted and unable to fly from his East Coast home.

In contrast, a plain-clothed male had arrived in a marked official vehicle, and promptly began going car-to-car in our event parking lot, with note pad and pen taking at license plate numbers.

While irony played outside as our car plates were being memorialized, we enjoyed Lipmann's satire inside as he, risking national insecurity, mocked "George Shrub" going about his business outside.

The next January, at our larger MLK event held at the FEC, we offered better facilities and more room — for event goers as well as more state-inspired surveillance. The entire FEC flat-floor was filled with exhibits or books. Local student art concerning King or civil rights issues dressed the walls, and poster-sized graphic photos showed burning buses and Martin Luther King Jr. being forcibly twisted over a booking desk by two uniformed officers.

In a Jeff Sessions-style gesture of Southern Hospitality, one poster showed a roomful of white youths pouring milkshakes and drinks over the heads of students sitting calmly in protest of segregation by sitting at a lunch counter.

Unlike our first MLK event, which only drew one plain-closed observer, this time there was an entire round table, toward the back, filled

with mature males calmly taking in our assorted musicians, authors and speakers. I took their pictures, engaged them, getting just enough awkwardly polite shrugs and denials of needing additional information to essentially confirm what I had heard — which is that local police had recently received special funding for various surveillance work.

However, these quiet men, gathered around the table, were clearly from out of town.

Later digging confirmed the existence of a new Federally-funded police/surveillance operation based near Salem. Such state operations received moderate national media attention.

So, Oregon got its share — and Florence's small, early MLK events appeared to merit their billable attention.

Rand Dawson
Siltcoos Lake

SHARE IN THE DREAM

Though the City of Florence has no formal celebration planned, City offices will be closed in observance of the celebration of Martin Luther King Day on Monday. Everyone has a different reason for celebrating this great individual, all the way from a day off from work to the realization that Dr. King was the turning point in our history for the equality of many groups in our society.

Martin Luther King "Had a Dream" that has resonated through our society and is still strong today. But is it just a dream?

In looking at the divisions in our society both economically and socially, has that dream, in Dr. King's own words, turned into a nightmare?

In an address, shortly after his "Dream" speech, he addressed questions that could be asked even more pointedly from today's headlines. What is a living wage for workers? Is income inequality as corrosive as racial injustice? What are the challenges of preserving a

multiracial democracy?

Dr. King went on to talk about the dignity of all work saying that "even menial workers should make enough so they can live and educate their children and buy a home and have the basic necessities of life."

This is very consistent with what we are striving for in the City of Florence as we strive to encourage affordable housing, and jobs that pay a wage that can allow our children, of all backgrounds, to get an education, buy a home and raise a family in Florene if they so choose.

Martin Luther King Day reminds me that we are all children of God, created equal, and I would ask that we step back and ask ourselves if the divisions in our society that seem to be insurmountable could not be resolved if we could remember the Golden Rule and share in the Dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Joe Henry
Florence Mayor

BEND THE ARC TOWARD JUSTICE

Sadly, the homegrown Florence tradition of honoring the life of Martin Luther King Jr. on his birthday in January has been put on hold for a month or two.

For 14 years, the civil rights legacy of Dr. King has been celebrated by local residents who shared his courageous vision of a color-blind society. Notable speakers including professors, activists and participants in the voting struggles in the 60s have all shared their memories, hopes and dreams with us in the Bromley Room in the Siuslaw Public Library, then marched with the audience simulating the experience of bringing brothers and sisters together for a great cause.

People were inspired.

They showed up.

In these turbulent times we might be tempted to revisit Dr. King's words and deeds with a

certain sadness — but I would bet he would be waving us on helping our nation to bend the arc of history toward justice.

Stuart Henderson
KXCR Radio

EXPANDING DR. KING'S LEGACY

The celebration (for MLK) in Florence has broadened and is presented in February/March to include all peoples. It was 2003 when the first celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was held in Florence, in January, and was followed by annual celebrations to coincide with Black History Month in February.

It was guided by a collaborative group committed to recalling the legacy of Dr. King and his mentor, Mahatma Gandhi, and how they stood on the shoulders of Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks and many others who gave their lives to fight mindless discrimination and hatred.

The scope of the annual celebration broadened to parse the word "Legislation" with exploration of the rights of children, women and workers within the context of civil, human and equal rights for all.

By exploring the power of language in law, ethics, goals as a community, history and rights of Indigenous peoples, safety and surveillance, and the changes in legislation, the goal has been to bring the past into the present to better understand and promote the rights of all people.

The celebrations have caused some people to ask us "Why do any kind of celebration of Black History and Indigenous Rights in Oregon and in Florence?"

For that reason, we need to continue to work for civil, human and equal rights in Florence.

Jenny Velinty
past member
Citizens Democracy Watch