

Hermiston pays tribute to MLK Jr.

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
Staff writer

As the nation prepares for Friday's presidential inauguration, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words are taking on new weight for those who are still struggling to come to terms with the nation's president-elect.

"Thinking about the Martin Luther King Days I've been through, I can't remember one more significant than the one today, given the times we live in," Jordan Chaney said.

Chaney, a black poet from the Tri-Cities, gave the keynote address at Hermiston's annual Martin Luther King Peace Walk. Never before, he admitted, has he been tested so much on following the civil rights leader's teachings about "choosing to love when the invitations to hate are so abundant."

"I wanted to love as indiscriminately as the sun shines," he said. "... You ask for something, you're going to get tested on it, and I failed that test several times."

The tests came as Chaney felt blindsided by friends who came out in support of a candidate who frequently makes headlines for his negative comments about minorities and women. Chaney said he also lost friendships when he decided to join in calling for the resignation of a Kennewick city councilor who made a derogatory post about Latinos on



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Trey Rome, 6, of Hermiston watches as his grandmother, Dawn Rome, takes a video of the Children of Polynesia sing the "Hymn of His Garment" on Monday in Hermiston.

Facebook.

When Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, two unarmed black men, were shot and killed by police within 24 hours of each other, Chaney spent a night praying and worrying for his son's safety on a Seattle visit. He has never been dragged at gunpoint out of his car before, he said, but that didn't make the fear and depression any less real as it hung over his life.

"Inside of my depression I could feel hate forming," he said.

It was the writings and speeches of people like Martin Luther King, Jr. that helped him extinguish that hate, he said. The words stopped feeling

distant, like "reading a fortune cookie," and became a roadmap.

Chaney learned about the power of love and non-violence from King, but he said sometimes people have a tendency to water down King's legacy to the point where they forget that he still spoke up for truth and still took action for justice.

"The thing that he was after was serving others and giving his life for that," Chaney said. "A lot of us are afraid just to lose a friend for speaking out."

King taught that "human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable," and Chaney said everyone must contin-

ue to fight for progress. "You persist with your message, you persist with your course, but you don't let it lose your humanity," he said.

Before Chaney's address, almost 100 people — black, white, Latino, Polynesian — bundled up and braved the cold and snow for a short peace walk around downtown Hermiston, singing "We Shall Overcome" and pausing at city hall for a short speech by Mayor David Drotzmann.

While waiting for Chaney to arrive from another address in the Tri-Cities, attendees watched a cultural performance from the Children of Polynesia



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Poet Jordan Chaney from the Tri-Cities speaks about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday at the First Methodist Church in Hermiston.

dance group and shared their feelings on Martin Luther King, Jr. during an open mic session.

Cassandra Frost said as a half-black, half-Indian woman who was raised by a white woman she has experienced racism but has also experienced the type of harmony and support across races that King dreamed of.

"Keep encouraging each other, keep loving each other," she said.

Alex Hobbs took the opportunity to share part of King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which he addressed white religious leaders in the South who had called civil rights protests "unwise and untimely."

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion

that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate," King wrote, "who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.'"

Hobbs added her own voice, saying that today there are many civil rights issues, from mass incarceration to immigration, that must be addressed by people of all races.

John Carbage, president of the Black International Awareness Club that has sponsored the event for the last 17 years, said that in recognition of its more diverse mission, the club will be changing its name in February to the Hermiston Cultural Awareness Club. The group meets the second Saturday of every month at Starbucks at 2 p.m. and everyone is welcome.

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Downtown parking gets the council's attention

Hermiston Herald

Before the Jan. 9 regular city council meeting, the council held a work session with staff to discuss downtown parking.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said a look at Google Earth images from the last 10 years shows — in an admittedly unscientific study — that on average about 44 percent of parking spots on Main Street are full, with somewhat similar numbers in other areas of downtown. However, complaints about limited parking downtown is something the city hears "all the time" from residents and business owners who say people avoid shopping downtown because they think they won't find parking.

"Whether or not there is an actual parking problem downtown or not, there's a perception in people's minds," Morgan said.

Some of that may come from a "phobia" of parallel

parking, he said, noting Google Earth images that show parking lots full or almost full even as most of the spots along the street are empty.

One low-cost solution that both adds spots and eases peoples' minds about having to parallel park is turning some of downtown's street parking into angled spots.

"That's the low-hanging fruit," Morgan said.

He said the city's engineers had drawn up plans to put angled parking spaces for a block along Gladys Avenue in front of the library. The new configuration would add four spots (each 19 feet long) to the block, get rid of more difficult parallel parking and still leave travel lanes more than 12 feet wide.

"We saw this as a possible way to ease our way into trying angled parking, and it's totally reversible if people don't like it," he said.

City councilors agreed to consider a motion at the Jan. 23 council meeting.

Ranch & Home gets development deal

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
Staff writer

The Hermiston city council approved an agreement with Ranch & Home on Jan. 9 to reimburse the retailer for a slew of development costs if it finishes building a store in Hermiston by Jan. 1, 2018.

Those incentives will increase if the company also convinces a grocery store to build next door by Oct. 1, 2018.

City manager Byron Smith said economic development, particularly bringing more retail opportunities to Hermiston, is one of the top goals the city council has set. After a "long process" working with owner George Dress in the planning stage, Smith said the city felt it would be worth offering some

incentives to get the ball rolling on construction of a Hermiston location.

"This is a new approach," he told the city council.

Ranch & Home currently has two locations in the Tri-Cities and one in Milton-Freewater, and sells supplies for home and garden, livestock, pets, sporting goods and clothing. As a retailer, it is not eligible for the property tax breaks given to some businesses that build in Hermiston's enterprise zone.

According to the agreement approved Monday, if Ranch & Home gets a building permit by April 1 and an occupancy permit by Jan. 1, 2018, the city will reimburse the company for its building permit, system development charges

and \$10,000 for extension of water and sewer lines that will also make it easier to develop neighboring properties in the future. The total package of incentives is estimated to be worth about \$107,800.

In addition, Ranch & Home will have space on its 18-acre property for additional retail development. If the company convinces a grocery store of at least 25,000 square feet to agree to build on that space by Oct. 1, 2018, then the city will reimburse Ranch & Home \$185,000 for road improvements on the north-east side of the property.

For every month that Ranch & Home misses those deadlines, the financial incentives will be reduced by 10 percent, and the deal is off if the dead-

lines are missed by more than six months.

Smith said parts of Hermiston are considered a "food desert" by the USDA based on the ratio of grocery stores to residents, and Hermiston residents spend an estimated \$21 million in the Tri-Cities each year on groceries alone. He said if Ranch & Home and a grocery store come in, the financial incentives would be returned to the city, county and school district through property taxes in just a couple of years.

The council unanimously approved the agreement, along with a replat of the three lots that make up the Ranch & Home property at 2500 S. Highway 395 near the Wal-Mart Distribution Center.

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