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Mesa honors the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Mesa, AZ – The Mayor of Mesa and a Grammy nominated jazz artist are both part of the events in the City of Mesa to remember the leadership and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The events are organized by the Mesa Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Committee and will be held from Saturday, Jan. 17 through Martin Luther King (MLK) Day Monday, Jan. 19.

The celebration begins with the MLK Community Gala Saturday, Jan. 17 at 6 p.m. at the Mesa Arts Center, 1 E. Main St. Grammy nominated jazz artist Jonathan Butler will perform songs from his albums "Living My Dream" and "Grace & Mercy" and will share his story of meeting Nelson Mandela and his life experiences that help him declare that he is "Living My Dream." Local artists will also be featured as part of the gala entertainment.

The gala starts with a red carpet walk and reception at 5 p.m. followed by the awards program at 6 p.m. to recognize local community organizers and leaders working to build a better community. Award winners include Forever Young Foundation, Kids Need to Read, MARC Community Resources, East Valley NAACP, Chicanos Por La Causa (Mesa), Mesa Association of Hispanic Citizen, Arizona Asian American Association and the Maricopa County Superior Courts Adult Probation Restitution Program. Awards will also be presented to the Veora E. Johnson Educator of the Year Mona Scott, a professor at Mesa Community College, and the Veora E. Johnson Student of the Year, Alpha Campa, a senior at Westwood High School. Scholarships will be presented to four community college students. For ticket information, visit www.mesamlk.org.

Mesa Mayor John Giles will be grand marshal of The MLK Parade which will be held Monday, Jan. 19 from 11 a.m. to noon along Center Street.

"I am honored to be grand marshal of the Mesa MLK Day Parade," Mayor Giles said. "It is important for communities to recognize and celebrate the civil rights achievements of Martin Luther King, Jr."

The parade will include Mesa Police, Mesa Fire, marching bands and community leaders and organizations. The parade will begin at University Drive and Center Street and proceed south to 1st Avenue. The destaging area will be along Center Street south to 2nd Avenue. At 9:30 a.m., Center Street will close between University Drive and Broadway, 1st Street will close between Macdonald and Centennial Way, 1st Avenue will close between Macdonald and Serrine and 2nd Avenue will close between Center Street and Serrine. At 10 a.m., Main Street will close between Country Club Drive and Mesa Drive. All of the streets will reopen by 1:30 p.m.

Following the parade, the MLK Festival will be held from noon to 4 p.m. at the Mesa Arts Center. The free program includes music; dance; food; an MLK creative writing, arts and oratory contest and information on job and volunteer opportunities, health and community outreach programs. There will also be a youth area with games, bounce houses and other activities.

This year's celebrations are using the theme "Working to End Childhood Hunger." The Mesa MLK Celebration Committee is partnering with United Food Bank to collect jars of peanut butter and jelly at all of the events. Donation bins will be located along the parade route.

The City of Mesa is coordinating with HandsOn Greater Phoenix for a community service project that honors the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Volunteers will paint the exterior of the homes of two residents struggling with health issues Saturday, Jan. 17 and Monday, Jan. 19. It is part of Love Your Block, a tested, high-impact service strategy in which community members are engaged in revitalizing their neighborhoods one block at a time. Volunteers can register at <http://www.mesaaz.gov/lyb/>.

The City of Mesa will be closed Monday, Jan. 19 in observance of MLK Day. The closures include libraries and recreation centers. Trash and recycle service will be on the normal collection schedule but residents should have barrels on the curb by 6 a.m. The Dobson Ranch Golf Course will be open. All bus and light rail routes will operate on a Sunday/holiday schedule.

Mesa's annual MLK celebrations were created after residents, in 1996, voted to establish a citywide holiday recognizing the leadership of Dr. King. For more information on the various MLK celebrations, visit www.mesamlk.org.

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