

14th King Day celebration brings awareness to society's injustices

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A multicultural program will be featured tomorrow at this year's state celebration of the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.

Organized by the state Martin Luther King Jr. Commission, in partnership with the New Jersey Anti-Defamation League, the 14th annual celebration will begin at 8:30 p.m. at Raritan Valley Community College in Branchburg.

Headlining the event will be Grammy-winning singer and New Jersey native Dionne Farris, along with two-time Emmy-nominated actor Yaphet Kotto of television's "Homicide: Life on the Street."

The program also will include Gov. Christie Whitman, contemporary poet Jahallah, songs by Coolwaterz, Secretary of State-designate DeForest "Buster" Soaries and others. Robert Pickett of WKRS- FM (98.7 KISS) will be master of ceremonies.

Commission Executive Director Dawn Du Verney-Wilkins said the choice of the college was prompted by a rash of anti-Semitic and racial graffiti discovered in neighboring Bridgewater since October.

"We realized Somerset County had a few incidents and thought it would be a great place to highlight this celebration," she said.

Other contributors include Rohit Vyas, a news director of TV Asia in Edison, the Rev. Young E. Song of Praise Korean Presbyterian Church in Franklin Township and the Rev. Noel Santiago of the Woodbridge Hispanic Christian Center.

Charles "Shai" Goldstein, executive director of the state Anti-Defamation League, said the goal of the program is to bring awareness to the injustice of bigotry and hatred.

While it has been more than 30 years since the death of the civil rights activist, the need to tell the message still exists, he said.

"What we need to learn here is that New Jersey has an excellent record, but there is still an incredible amount of work to be done," **Goldstein** said. "You can't separate New Jersey from the rest of the country."

The event is free but tickets must be reserved in advance by calling (609) 777-2923.