

## QCSD 1st MLK Day of Service inspires change

*"Talk is cheap, actions speak louder than words."*

By Gary Weckselblatt

**C**lose to 200 students packed into the Quakertown Community High School cafeteria this morning, listened intently to a dynamic speaker, and then braved the bitter cold in various parts of Bucks County to serve their fellow citizens.

The district's first Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service - following a year of planning - was a fulfilling moment for those working to make a positive impact and inspire young people to do the same.

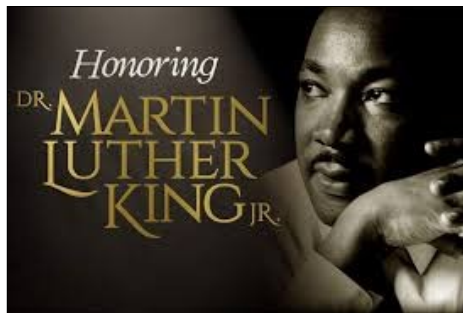
"I'm really proud you're not just using the day to stimulate the economy," said Rev. Dr. Gregory James Edwards, an MLK scholar and keynote speaker who described himself as a "radical truth teller." The reverend praised the efforts of teacher Rachel Girman, school psychologist Kevin Kelly and others for their "vision and tireless efforts" in helping to make this day of service happen. Mrs. Girman, advisor to Model UN and Mini-THON, organized several meetings with teachers, administrators and students and was a central figure in the MLK Day of Service accomplishment.

"Talk is cheap, actions speak louder than words," Dr. Edwards said. "That's why you're all out here today. ... Don't quote (MLK's) words and not be devoted to his work."

By virtue of his background, Dr. Edwards' words hold significant meaning. He is founder and Senior Pastor of the Resurrected Life Commu-



**Rev. Dr. Gregory James Edwards, an MLK scholar, was the keynote speaker at the district's first MLK Day of Service Monday.**



nity Church in Allentown and President and CEO of the Resurrected Community Development Corporation. He was inducted into the inaugural class of the Martin Luther King, Jr. College of Pastoral Leadership at Morehouse College, for his exemplary leadership in advancing Martin Luther King's Beloved Community. Morehouse also honored Dr. Edwards by inducting him into the college's prestigious Martin

Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers.

Dr. Edwards shared conversations he's had with his wife who "tells me no birth is possible without pain and struggle. ... What you're doing by showing up today... you are starting the pushing process. You are leaning in and pushing."

He said Dr. King was an "interrupter for justice," and encouraged students to make their voices heard and to interrupt to stop the spread of racism, wherever they hear it -- whether it's at the dinner table, family barbecue, locker room, school hallways, classroom, water cooler, church pews, or school board meetings.

"He is absolutely correct," said QCHS senior Sara Vahdatshoar.

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*Dr. Harner: "It's been a year of listening and learning and engaging."*

## MLK Day

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"Opportunities to have these type of conversations need to be more prevalent. Days like this are fantastic, and will help bring the community together."

Speaking of her fellow students, freshman Angelina Becker said, "It's amazing how all of these people, who could have been off relaxing today, came here instead. It shows what we can do as a collective, as a group, and how amazing people in our school are."

Students and teacher chaperones visited Family Service Association of Bucks County, Hope ReStored Thrift Store, Phoebe Richland Retirement Community, the Quakertown and Trumbauersville food pantries, LifePath, First Church of the Brethren, and Pennridge FISH.

In the high school cafeteria, dozens of students performed several acts of service. Many, including the children of teachers, packed plastic eggs for Quakertown's Borough Easter egg hunt. Others wrote cards for veterans stationed overseas. And several created recipe books and packed toiletries for Laurel House, a domestic violence agency in Montgomery County.



**Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner addresses students during the MLK Day of Service.**

At Strayer Middle School, the Gay Straight Alliance, through donations from the school community, made 90 care packages for children unexpectedly admitted to Grand View Hospital.

"I'm proud of our kids, putting in the time to do really important work," Mrs. Girman said. "Our goal is to make it bigger and better next year."

Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner said he was grateful for the leadership of Mrs. Girman and other teachers for making the MLK Day of Service so successful. "Today was an opportunity to make the world a better place, and our school district has

done that," he said. "We need to make sure we push this forward."

The district's efforts were noted in the media. Jamie Stover, a 2008 graduate of QCHS, covered the event for WFMZ-TV. 6ABC Action News Philadelphia was also there, in addition to WHYY-FM, The Intelligencer and Bucks County Herald. On Sunday, The Morning Call headline stated: "Year after racial incident, Quakertown sees MLK Day as teachable moment"

A racial incident on Oct. 6, 2017, where two Strayer students shouted hateful words to Cheltenham cheerleaders following a football game at

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**QCHS junior Joe Lock helps Dr. Edwards get his microphone in place prior to the keynote speaker's interview with freshman Angelina Becker in the school's TV studio.**





Students in the high school cafeteria work to fill eggs for Quakertown Borough's Easter egg hunt during Monday's MLK Day of Service.

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Alumni Field, was the inspiration for change on QCSD. Dr. Harner pledged he would not allow the situation to go unchallenged, and his administration, with the support of the School Board, developed plans to turn an ugly situation into a positive.

"It gave us the opportunity to stop, look in the mirror, and take a positive step forward," Dr. Harner said. "It was the catalyst to bring everyone in the community together."

The Pearl S. Buck Foundation was hired to bring its system-wide diversity and inclusion initiative to the district. The foundation has assessed 400 employees as part of "The Welcome Workplace" program, in which professional trainers and staff are working with district leadership and stakeholders to build individual and group intercultural competency.

The district has started a Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The committee is analyzing the district's mission and vision statements, discussing our community's changing demographics, learning about how we can make our infrastructure even more equitable for every student, and starting work on our strategic plan. This meeting is for all interested administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members. All are welcome!

The Peace Center has taught its curriculum of diversity and acceptance to all QCSD fourth graders, and will do so again this year. In addition, Dr. Harner held a dinner for parents of African-American students to hear their concerns and explain district plans moving



forward. On Monday, Dr. Harner said "It's been a year of listening and learning and engaging."

As Dr. Edwards said to students, parents and district employees, "There is no ZIP Code in our nation absent from the scourge of racism. ... All of us have bad moments. And the challenge is not to make you worst moment your most defining memory."

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**This group of QCHS students helped stock shelves and performed cleanup duties at the Quakertown Food Pantry.**



**Photo by Joseph Lock**



**Quakertown Community High School students spent their day of service at the Hope ReStored Thrift Shop.**



**At Strayer Middle School, the Gay Straight Alliance, through donations from the school community, made 90 care packages for children unexpectedly admitted to Grand View Hospital.**



**Quakertown junior Jolly Ekpe is interview by WHYY reporter Avi Wolfman-Arent.**



**Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner speaks with students as they write cards to veterans serving overseas.**