

# Students march to celebrate unity, showcase ‘The Real Dearborn’

By Ryan Dickey for The Press & Guide

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Dozens of students from four Dearborn high schools marched along Michigan Avenue to celebrate and honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday — the federal holiday recognizing the body of work, ideals, and sacrifice of the late civil rights leader — and also to highlight their unity as a community.

Students from Dearborn High, Fordson, Edsel Ford, and Divine Child helped to organize the second annual “The Real Dearborn” unity march, consisting of a trek from the Ford Community & Performing Arts Center to the Ford Centennial Library and back.

At the end of the route, speakers from each school, a few dignitaries, and Dearborn Mayor John O’Reilly Jr. spoke during an open mic session with the goal to promote peace as well as highlight King’s legacy.

Dearborn Police Chief Ronald Haddad, City Council President Susan Dabaja and other Dearborn officials joined the students marching in the freezing rain before returning to the safe environs of the Performing Arts Center to hear the speakers of the day.

Dearborn Public Schools Supt. Glenn Maleyko was the first to speak, and thanked the students who took the time and care to organize the event, while sporting a Dearborn Unified hockey sweatshirt. The Dearborn Unified team is a high school hockey team comprised of students from Dearborn, Fordson, and Edsel Ford high schools.

He said that although he does, in fact, enjoy hockey, that the symbolism of each school coming together to bring out the best in all of them is in line with the true spirit of King’s messages.

O’Reilly was the next to address the crowd of more than 100 attendees.

While admitting that at some time in the distant past, Dearborn was not always seen as an inclusive community to outsiders, O’Reilly said “this community has always been diverse, and will continue to be diverse.”

“We are a community that has amazing resources and amazing talent — and if we come together — we will achieve everything that anyone can dream of,” he said.

Jasmine Little, a junior at Edsel Ford, took the podium following the mayor and quoted King from one of his speeches known as “How long? Not long.”

“We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself — a society that can live with its conscious,” King said in his speech.

“I feel we are fulfilling Dr. King’s dream of having not just ‘little black boys and little black girls, and little white boys and little white girls’, but also little Arab boys and little Arab girls,

little Latino boys and little Latina girls, little Asian boys and little Asian girls,” Little said. “And anyone else in between can join hands as sisters and brothers in a nation where everybody put in this world was indeed created equal despite what anybody tries to say.”

High school students Sultan Elhaj, Gadi Bezih, Kevin Cassio, and Layail Mustafa also spoke, along with Zen Nelson and Kayla Lindow from O.L. Smith Middle School, and Ali Abbas, a fifth grader from the Muslim American Youth Academy.