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## Youth are urged to follow Dr. King down a road of hopes and dreams



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Shannon Blankenship, 7, paints a poster Monday with her father, Shawn, at Cleveland's Lincoln-West High School. Although students were off in honor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the first floor at Lincoln-West was bustling with volunteers during a day of service.

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Plain Dealer Reporter

State Sen. Nina Turner called upon the region's youth Monday at a breakfast celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day to pay homage to the civil rights leader by living up to his legacy with a sense of civic responsibility and integrity in public service.

And throughout her call to action, Turner returned to a rousing refrain: "Hope is the motivator, but the dream is the driver."

"Young people, you're going to have moments," she said. "But the

Creator gave you two hands — one to reach forward and one to reach back, lifting as you climb."

For the 11th consecutive year, the annual breakfast kicked off King Day, drawing nearly 300 people to a ballroom at the Cleveland Marriott Downtown at Key Center.

King, assassinated at age 39, would have been 82 on Jan. 15. Many see his life's work as a model for cultivating social justice and building community.

But Turner said that nearly a half-century after King delivered the famous speech in which he pro-

claimed, "I have a dream," he would be dismayed by the injustice that persists.

"Dr. King would be perplexed that we have a governor who can't find one qualified African-American," Turner said, referring to Gov. John Kasich's recent Cabinet appointments — which featured no racial diversity. "Not one qualified Latino."

Turner's comments came on the heels of a protest Saturday from a coalition of local leaders, who insisted Kasich diversify his Cabinet or resign.

The Rev. Mark Johnson, pastor of

Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Cleveland, delivered the Monday breakfast event's keynote address. He also demanded greater integrity from elected officials.

He condemned the corruption that has plagued local government and a culture of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours."

Johnson said leaders today have lost sight of their priorities. He called upon his listeners to return to the example set by King, who, he said, was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good.

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## KING

FROM B1

### Youth urged to follow Dr. King

As Johnson spoke, all across the Cleveland area, people were accepting the challenge. City Year Cleveland, a nonprofit organization devoted to engaging young people in public service, staged five community improvement projects throughout the city Monday. Volunteers painted at a West Side homeless shelter and visited MedWish International, where they sorted and packaged medical supplies to send to Third World countries.

Volunteers also spent time at an East Side church, painting rooms that will become a technology center for the community, and helped remodel the downtown YMCA's youth center and recreation room.

Although students had the day off at Cleveland's Lincoln-West High School, the building's first floor was bustling with volunteers, sanding and painting hundreds of lockers for students in the school's Community Wrap Around Academy.

Principal Maria Carlson said in many ways the project — which was born of the initiative of about a half-dozen students trying to beautify their deteriorating school — reflects the spirit of King's message.

"This all began with a small group of people trying to make a big change," Carlson said. "And that's how every great movement starts — with an inspired few."

Before this school year, when



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Dave Luchini, bottom, and Darrell Holub paint lockers Monday at Cleveland's Lincoln-West High School. Volunteers from American Greetings Corp.'s finance department volunteered for the job as part of a day of service in honor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Lincoln-West was divided into separate academies, the building's first floor had earned a reputation as the setting of violent fights and a haven for delinquent students skipping class, Carlson said. Over time, as lockers fell victim to vandalism and disrepair, the floor was nicknamed "the projects."

Then a small group of students who had just entered the academy approached Carlson to complain. The principal suggested they work together to improve their surroundings.

So the seven students stayed for hours every afternoon after school to sand down lockers and layer on fresh coats of beige

paint. The work was slow-going. But the students persisted for months, and Carlson said she noticed something remarkable stirring among the student body.

Despite some of her colleagues' admonitions that the students' work would only be destroyed by vandals, the lockers remained pristine, and students grew proud to call the first floor home.

City Year heard about the students' efforts and wanted to join them. Another 80 volunteers from American Greetings Corp. and 10 from Frito-Lay also helped out Monday.

Sophomore Elizabeth Semidei, 15, who sanded lockers alongside her friends, said spending the

holiday in service and finishing the hard work her fellow students started honors King's edict to rise above the naysayers.

"Those people who told our principal, 'Don't bother,'" Elizabeth said. "Can you imagine where we would be if we had those people running our school? Martin Luther King fought for everyone to be equal. Without him, I wouldn't be here today — in these halls, getting this education. And this is giving back, letting everyone know we have conquered our limitations. And we did it together."

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