

# **NAACP recognizes Pastor Helfrich at 38th Annual Commemoration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer  
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ALTON - The Alton Branch of the NAACP held the 38th Annual Commemoration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Sunday afternoon at the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

The service, "The Journey Is Not Over After 50 Years: Let's Do More!", included performance from the Riverbend Community Choir, a skit from Three Purple Coats Youth Troupe and special guest speaker Mayor of East St. Louis Emeka Jackson-Hicks as the community gather to recognize, honor and celebrate Dr. King.

Mayor Brant Walker said although the country has seen some progress over the last 50 years, there is still a lot more that needs to be done.

"We have made great strides but we still have a lot to do and a long way to go. Not only do we have a lot to do across this country, we have a lot to do right here in the city of Alton," Mayor Walker said. "I am incredibly proud to say that this administration is the most diverse administration that the city of Alton has had in 180 years. I have three senior positions that for the first time are filled by African Americans in the city."

Mayor Walker said the progress in Alton needs to go further and was excited to announce a new addition to the Alton Police Department.

"Under the direction and leadership of Chief Jake Simmons, on January 23rd we will have our first African American police officer hired in over 14 years in the city of Alton," Mayor Walker said. "My goal is to ensure that our police department is reflective of our community, it's got to be reflective of the community that it has chosen to serve and protect, and that's what we're trying to do right now."

Each year the Alton Branch NAACP awards one member of the community for their efforts toward improving their community and bringing people closer together. This year's recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Award was presented to Pastor Steven Helfrich of The Bridge Church for his efforts to help make the community a better place for everyone.

"I became a member of the church about two and half, three years ago, and I can tell you this, Pastor Helfrich is one of the most dynamic pastors. He's there for everyone in this community," former President of the Alton Branch NAACP James Gray said. "Pastor Helfrich is one outstanding citizen."

Gray added that it's Helfrich's commitment to helping our neighbors everyday that makes him such a tremendous asset to the community and so deserving of the award.

"When I first heard about receiving this award I was amazed," Pastor Helfrich said. "I don't feel worthy, but I'm so thankful. I see a lot of Samaritans out here in this service and I'm looking forward to how we unite and come together."

President of the Alton Branch NAACP Andy Hightower said it was great to see such a diverse audience at Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church Sunday.

"We believe that Dr. King would be happy to see blacks and whites, Democrats and Republicans, come together to celebrate his legacy," Hightower said.

