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Elgin recognizes Ellis, White with Martin Luther King awards

BY ERIC PETERSON



Elgin Area School District U-46 board member Traci O'Neal Ellis, right, accepts the city of Elgin's 2018 Dr. King Humanitarian Award at Elgin's 33rd annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast as event Chair Danise Habun looks on. *Eric Peterson | Staff Photographer*

Elgin Area School District U-46 board member Traci O'Neal Ellis received Elgin's 2018 Dr. King Humanitarian Award while Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White was honored with its Dr. King Legacy Award at a prayer breakfast Saturday during the city's 33rd annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration.

Ellis' recognition was but one example of the event's emphasis on education. In fact, the other nominee this year was also a representative of U-46 -- Ronald Raglin, assistant superintendent for educational support programs and alignment.

As the recipient of the city's Dr. King Legacy Award, White had also been scheduled as the breakfast's keynote speaker but was forced to cancel due to illness. He was represented by his daughter, Glenna White Jones.

She spoke of how her father met King through a friend he'd made at Alabama State University, and how much the civil rights leader influenced his life of public service.

Though he'd won an athletic scholarship, it was unusual for a Chicago native like White to travel to the south for college at that time, his daughter said.

"He learned nonviolence was the way to go," Jones said. "His meeting with Dr. Martin Luther King inspired him to do all the things he's done."



Courtesy of Little City, 2016 Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, here receiving an honor a couple of years ago, wasn't at the prayer breakfast Saturday but received Elgin's 2018 Dr. King Legacy Award. -

That includes 16 years in the state legislature, two terms as Cook County recorder of deeds, 20 years as secretary of state, and his establishment of the Jesse White Tumbling Team. During its 59 years so far, the team has helped support and guide 17,000 young people, Jones said.

She said her father has remained dedicated to helping others, encouraging those around him to make sure they do something good for someone else every day.

"He walks it like he talks it," she said.

In accepting the Dr. King Humanitarian Award, Ellis said she was overwhelmed but would continue to recognize King's call to action.

"What words can I use to describe the honor even to be nominated?" she asked. "This award represents Dr. King's reminder that it isn't always enough to shake one's head at injustice."

Ellis also recognized the dedication to King's message of her fellow nominee, Raglin.

"He's quietly but fiercely doing the work of Dr. King every day," she said.

Ellis is also a graduate of U-46 as well as executive director of human resources for the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy.

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‘Justice is a right for this community’

District U-46 board member O’Neal Ellis receives MLK Humanitarian Award
BY JANELLE WALKER



Traci O’Neal Ellis, a School District U46 board member, receives the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award on Saturday. (Janelle Walker/Courier-News)

Receiving the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award on Saturday at Elgin’s 33rd annual Dr. King Prayer Breakfast is a validation of everything she has done, Traci O’Neal Ellis said.

O’Neal Ellis, a School District U46 board member, caused controversy when a private Facebook post, in which she said the American flag meant no more to her than toilet paper in reaction to the controversy over NFL players taking a knee during the national anthem, made news.

“(This award) is confirmation and validation that justice is a right for this community. As Dr. King said, and I am paraphrasing, ‘It is always the right time to do the right thing,’ ” O’Neal Ellis said.

Elgin’s annual prayer breakfast was held Saturday morning at the Hemmens Cultural Arts Center’s Exhibition Hall.

In previous years, the breakfast has been held at Elgin Community College, but it was moved to accommodate the number of people who wanted to attend this year, said Danise Habun, chairwoman of the annual celebration.

The city venue allowed for about 100 more to attend.

Also this year, there was no public performance event. In past years, that event was held Sunday in the Hemmens auditorium.

City events continue Monday, when the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday is observed.

Those events include a food drive to benefit eight area food pantries and the seventh annual MLK Day of Service Youth Leadership Conference at the Centre of Elgin Heritage Ballroom.

The breakfast’s keynote speaker was to have been Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, but White was unable to attend because of illness. His daughter, Glenna Jones White, appeared in his stead.

Jesse White, 83, was a college student at the University of Alabama during the early days of King's work, Jones White said.

He met King when he attended a college basketball game when White was on the team, she said.

"My father was participating in history," Jones White said. "He saw in Dr. King his commitment to helping people."

Jesse White followed that example during his years in the U.S. Army, as an educator and as an elected official in the Illinois House and now as secretary of state, she said.

He also founded the Jesse White Tumblers, who regularly appear in the Elgin Fourth of July Parade.

The city presented White, through his daughter, with the Dr. King Legacy Award.

Also nominated this year for the Humanitarian Award was Ron Raglin, U46 assistant superintendent for educational support programs and alignment.

O'Neal Ellis said she shares the award with Raglin, who works to support the 40,000-plus students in U46.

"Ron Raglin is quietly and fiercely doing the work every day in U46," O'Neal Ellis said. "I accept and will hold this award in trust for those in this community who have worked alongside me using your platforms to amplify the causes of the marginalized ... not for personal gain."

At times, her words have not been temperate, O'Neal Ellis said.

The controversial Facebook post came during the controversy over NFL players kneeling during the national anthem in protest of social injustices faced by African-Americans. Her comment on the flag drew criticism.

"I am called by God to care for the the oppressed, the marginalized ... the least of these. This award represents Dr. King's reminder that it is not enough to shake our heads at injustice — there comes a time when we must take a position that is not safe for politics or not popular. When you hear or see me speaking out on injustice in not the most politically correct way, my conscious has pricked me to speak out," she said.

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MLK Food Drive in Elgin eyes 10-ton collection goal

Organization cites more partnerships, donation sites in raising target

BY GLORIA CASAS



A community food drive is part of the City of Elgin Human Relations Commission's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration. (Justin Sullivan/Getty)

More donation sites and partnerships should mean an increase in contributions to this year's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Food Drive in Elgin, which has a goal of collecting 10 tons of donated items, organizer Joseph Wars said.

All middle and high schools in School District U46 are participating and several public and private elementary schools have joined the effort this year, Wars said. He picked up donations from Canton Middle School in Streamwood this week.

"I have an SUV and it was loaded down," Wars said. He estimated Canton students collected 800 pounds of food.

Getting schools involved is a "great teaching experience for youth to learn to look after their fellow man," he said.

The Gail Borden Public Library is doing something new this year — a Food for Fines campaign that will benefit the MLK food drive, Wars said. The library collected 900 cans of food on the first day in exchange for forgiving late return fees, he said.

Every year, Wars sets a goal the community usually reaches or exceeds. Last year, eight tons were donated to local food pantries. He is hoping for 10 tons this year, he said.

The food drive is part of City of Elgin Human Relations Commission's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, which began 33 years ago. Wars said it is one of the state's oldest celebrations, featuring a prayer breakfast, art contest and a Youth Day of Service.

The drive was added as a way to do something for the community as well as get people involved in helping the community, Wars said. King's birthday has become a national day of service to honor his legacy, he said.

"The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Food Drive is a great opportunity for the community to rally together and provide food to several local pantries that serve our Elgin residents," said Molly Center, communications specialist for the city. "Now in its 7th year,

the food drive continues to collect and distribute more and more canned goods and household items, demonstrating the caring and compassionate community we are proud of here in Elgin.”

A January food drive helps local pantries that get taxed over the holidays, Wars said. The food is distributed to places like the Greater Elgin Food Bank and others served by the Northern Illinois Food Bank, he said.

Children younger than 18 make up 36 percent of “hungry neighbors” and seniors age 60 and older make up 9 percent, according to the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Sixty-six percent of households using food bank services have incomes that fall below the federal poverty level, agency data shows.

While the food drive typically wraps up on the MLK holiday, schools will continue to collect items through next week because many returned from winter vacation later than in previous years, organizers said.

Donation boxes are located at:

Elgin City Hall, 150 Dexter Court;

Elgin Fire Department stations;

Gail Borden Public Library, 270 N. Grove Ave.;

Butera at 1 Clock Tower Plaza and Tyler Creek Plaza;

Area Jewel stores;

Elgin Police Department, 151 Douglas Ave.;

YWCA, 220 E. Chicago St.; and

Taylor YMCA, 50 N. McLean Blvd.

SPORTS SECTION

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Bartlett nearly upsets Lincoln-way East

BY KEN TILLOTSON

DeKALB -- The Bartlett girls basketball team gave one-loss Lincoln-Way East all it could handle, but couldn't quite finish the job.

The Hawks carried a 46-39 lead into the fourth quarter, but the experienced Griffins showed their mettle down the stretch. They finished with a 10-2 run in the final two minutes to secure a hard-fought 65-58 victory in Saturday night's quarterfinal of the 5th annual DeKalb MLK Classic.

Lincoln Way East (20-1), which had five players score in double figures, hit 14 of 18 free throws in the fourth quarter.

Bartlett senior guard Kayla Hare poured in a game-high 22 points and grabbed 7 rebounds, while Teegan Noesen and freshman Lexie Sinclair finished with 12 points each for the Hawks.

"We had a state-ranked team on the ropes and I think we showed that we have some young girls who made some mistakes. They're a senior-laden team and well polished and a great coach and that ended up being the difference in the fourth quarter," said Bartlett coach Brad Hunt.

"They were very composed in the fourth quarter and they knew what they were doing offensively," added Hare, who tallied 29 points in a victory over Johnsbury earlier in the day. "They're a very good team, but we played with a lot of energy and if we keep doing that we'll be OK."

The Griffins led 25-23 at halftime despite getting in foul trouble, but Bartlett (10-8) came out on fire in the third quarter and connected on all five 3-point attempts in a 23-point outburst.

Noesen, Sinclair and Hare hit 3 trifectas in a row to give the Hawks a 37-32 advantage, then Hare dropped in another 3-pointer from the top to cap a 7-point run and extend their advantage to 44-34 with 1:56 left in the third quarter.

"Everyone on the team was doing their jobs and we were hitting open 3s," Hare said.

Lincoln-Way East chipped away and regained a 53-52 lead with 3:29 left. Sinclair tied the game at 55-55 with a pair of free throws, but Kaley Sheehan drilled a 3-pointer from the corner at the 1-minute mark and the Griffins sealed the win by hitting 7-of-8 free throws from there.

"I kept telling our girls we needed to get to the line. We had them in the one-and-one the entire fourth quarter but didn't get there," Hunt said. "Give them credit and we're going to learn from this. We have a lot of young babies who are going to be really good.

"We just put in a new offense a week ago and it looked really good then it stalled a little bit. But I'm ecstatic for today and where we're going and from where we came from."

Savannah Standifer added 6 points, Shelly Banks had 5 and Danielle Kleeman grabbed 8 rebounds for Bartlett, which will play in the fifth-place bracket at 3 p.m. Monday. Carolyn Waleski went 8-for-8 from the line in a team-high 14-point effort for the Griffins while Sheehan and Katchie Savic collected 12 points each.

Hunt had nothing but superlatives for Hare, who along with Kleeman, are the team's only senior starters.

"Kayla is special. Twenty-nine points in the first game and 22 in this one. If she's not all-state then I don't know who should be," Hunt said.

Bartlett 73, Johnsburg 56: The Hawks opened the tournament with a win over Johnsburg behind 29 points from Kayla Hare. Lexie Sinclair and Shelly Banks scored 12 each.

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BC holds off Elgin to go 2-0 in MLK tourney

BY ALLEN OSHINSKI

For playing their second game of the day, Elgin and Burlington Central played with plenty of energy and intensity, even if it wasn't always directed properly.

The Rockets' boys basketball team opened a big first-quarter lead then staved off several Elgin charges to post a 66-55 victory in pool play of the Central MLK Classic Saturday.

With Zach Schutta in particular off to a hot start, the Rockets opened a 23-4 lead before the Maroons regrouped. They got within 10 points several times in the second half, but every time the Rockets answered.

"Both teams had lulls defensively and offensively, but when it came down to it, we made a few plays at the right times," said Central coach Brett Porto. "There were moments when we were just getting a little too helter-skelter offensively, and it seemed like whenever they would come back we would settle down and get a nice offensive action and take advantage of it."

The key was "just running 30 seconds to a minute of clock and executing our offense, trying to get a layup down low for 2 points," Schutta said.

Schutta finished with 27 points, 9 rebounds, and 4 assists for the Rockets (14-2). Patrick Mayfield added 13 points, and Michael Kalusa chipped in 9 points and 9 boards.

The Rockets' 4-guard lineup outrebounded the Maroons, 37-23.

With Central leading 8-0, Elgin coach Mike Sitter subbed out all 5 starters, but the second unit couldn't do much to stem the tide. Central got its first 5 baskets from 5 different players. The Rockets built the lead to 14-0 before Michael Weatherburn's layup got Elgin on the board.

Elgin slowly fought its way back. The Maroons closed the third quarter on a 14-6 run to make it 48-39. They got as close as 8 in the fourth, but could get no closer.

Trevon Morris gave the Maroons a big lift off the bench, scoring 16 points and igniting some runs with quick hands on defense.

Dan Toolsie added 12 points and 12 rebounds, and Roy Panthier scored 12 points for Elgin (6-11).

"I told my kids that if they play this hard the rest of the year, then I have no complaints," Sitter said. "We can get better execution-wise, we can improve shooting-wise, things like that, but you can't fault our effort."

Earlier in the day, the Maroons beat Hampshire. Sitter announced earlier this week that he will step down after the season to become Hampshire's athletic director, but he insisted he felt no divided loyalties Saturday.

"That job hasn't started yet, it won't start until the season's over, so I'm going to give these kids all I have," he said.

Burlington Central will play Hampshire at 12:30 p.m. Monday in the final pool play game. A Rocket win will put them in the 6:30 p.m. championship game against McHenry.

Burlington Central 101, North Boone 45: The Rockets opened the day with a rout of North Boone. Jake Lenschow led the way with 16 points, Patrick Mayfield and Jayvon Johnson added 15 each, Zach Schutta had 14, Caden Scott 12 and Michael Kalusa 11.

Elgin 64, Hampshire 56: Dan Toolsie struck for 33 points to lead the Maroons to the win in their first game of the day. Trey Yarber added 11 points for Elgin. Marcus Lazar led Hampshire with 16 points and Collin Woods added 13.

Hampshire 66, North Boone 36: Woods had 14 points to lead the Whip-Purs to the win. Lazar added 12 and Jonathan Westerlund 11 for Hampshire (5-11).

Kaneland falls twice: The Knights (6-12) fell to McHenry 77-45 and to Wheaton Academy 60-38. Blake Feiza scored 12 points in the McHenry loss then had 8 against Wheaton Academy. Rhett Espe and Luke Brost added 8 points each against Wheaton Academy.

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W. Aurora outlasts South Elgin

BY RICK ARMSTRONG

Coaches often preach about basketball being a four-quarter game.

With a share of the Upstate Eight Valley lead on the line, South Elgin's players were provided a good example of that Friday night in a 73-55 loss to West Aurora.

"We competed for three and a half quarters," Storm coach Brett Johnson said.

Junior guard Drake Montgomery came up with a steal and went half the length of the court for a layup, pulling South Elgin (10-4, 2-2) within 45-43 with 1:28 remaining in the third quarter.

The Blackhawks (11-4, 4-0) responded quickly, however, sparked by the shooting of an unlikely hero in junior reserve Moshe Rogers and the good hands of guards Camron Donatlan, Damian Virgen and Traevon Brown.

West Aurora went on a 19-3 spurt over a span of 5:15 to put the game away. It started with Brown's rebound basket and Virgen's steal and layup to close the third quarter.

The Blackhawks thrived on pressuring the ball.

"We talk and play defense as a team," Virgen said. "They couldn't handle our pressure and kept turning the ball over. We're loaded. We're stacked."

Rogers, a 6-foot-3 forward, opened the fourth quarter with the first of his three 3-pointers.

“Moshe was tough,” West Aurora coach Brian Johnson said. “When we roll, we have so many guys that can score. We don’t need someone to throw in 30 for us to be successful. We were able to turn them over and had five or so in that run.”

South Elgin turned the ball over 17 times after leading 34-33 at halftime.

Rogers made his third 3-pointer with 4:13 remaining to cap the decisive spurt.

He didn’t look like a guy who came in averaging 2.9 points and shooting just 22 percent (4-for-18) on 3-pointers.

The key, apparently, is clearing his mind.

“I just gotta shoot it and not think about it too much,” Rogers said. “If I think about it too much, I’ll miss. Just fire, let it go.”

In the final 90 seconds, Rogers scooped up a loose ball and went in for a layup, giving him 13 points for the game. It’s the first time he’s reached double figures.

“I just had to wait my turn and be unselfish,” Rogers said. “It will come to me. I’m not going to rush anything. We’ve got to play together.”

Virgen led the way with 15 points. Senior forward Jared Crutcher added 13, Donatlan 12 and Brown 10. Crutcher barely missed a triple-double, adding nine rebounds and nine blocked shots.

“I wish I had 10,” Crutcher said of the blocked shots. “I just played good help defense and tried to be there with the right timing. I practice it a lot, and I take pride in it.”