

Anderson leaders pushed to address dropouts, crimes

By Titus Ledbetter III
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Katrina Spigner called Thursday for Anderson leaders to speak out against injustice with all of the problems facing the people of South Carolina.

Spigner, an author and motivational speaker, said at the city of Anderson's Second Annual Mayor's MLK Breakfast that leaders should not keep quiet while the state languishes with high dropout rates among students and instances of incarceration. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. talked about serving others and speaking up for others with a heart full of grace, Spigner said.

"We are charged with being a voice in the neighborhoods, cities, counties and the state," Spigner said. "Because we have been given this opportunity, we can't afford not to use our voice."

Spigner also shared a personal story about a teacher who stifled Spigner's voice after she was bused to a formerly all-white school in South Carolina during integration.

More than 100 turned out for the breakfast, which took place at the Anderson Recreation Center, said Anderson Mayor Terence Roberts.

Roberts also honored Anderson City Council member Beatrice Thompson as well as Anderson School District 5 Trustee Al Norris Jr. at the event as community trailblazers. The awards were presented to recognize contributions to the local community, Roberts said.

Dick Cockrell, 83, a retired priest from Anderson, said that event was "wonderful." He was touched by Spigner's speech, he said.

"Katrina was overpowering," Cockrell said. "She told the truth about her experiences. We could all identify in different ways."

The Rev. James Bennett, 53 of New Beginnings Ministries in Anderson said he was glad the city took the time to recognize King. He was really happy to see Thompson and Norris honored at as community trailblazers for continuing to have a positive impact on the local area.

Roberts told the crowd that that it was important to embrace the ideals of King because he stood for peace and freedom. It is still a challenge to make sure all children are educated fairly and equally, and everyone needs to help address a lot of local issues, Roberts said.

"We still have a lot of work to do," Roberts said. "It is a never-ending opportunity to reach out and get to know someone we don't know and work to make our community better."

Wanda Johnson of Anderson sang "Life Every Voice and Sing" at the breakfast. After her performance that the song carried a new meaning for her, she said following her performance, after the recent election of the nation's first black president.

Brandon Groves of Belton also sang Stevie Wonder's rendition of "Happy Birthday" in honor of King.

Bobby Brown, 68, of Anderson said he was also impressed with Spigner's speech and was glad to come out for the event.

"I thought it was great," he said. "It touched me because we realize how far we have come."

