

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

President Ronald Reagan designated Martin Luther King Jr. Day a national holiday in 1986, but unlike other widely-recognized celebrations, Jan. 20 does not have a standard set of activities.

At least not in Liberal. Previous years have seen a variety of activities set up to observe the birthday of the great Civil Rights leader — marches, lectures, chili suppers. This year’s MLK Jr. celebration will offer a little bit of everything.



“I was so frustrated with throwing something together every year,” said local pastor, the Rev. Adam Moore. “This year, I said to myself, ‘We can’t keep doing this, we need to make a better effort.’”

With the support of local churches, community leaders and individuals, Moore organized a day with something for everyone. Not only are the activities varied, they will take place at different venues around town.

First Southern Baptist Church, located at 621 N. Western, will offer the community a virtual tour of King's home in Atlanta. Church pastor, the Rev. Jack Jacob, put his technological skills to work on the project envisioned by Moore.

"We were trying to get set up a virtual tour of MLK's birthplace," Moore said. "A lot of people will never get to Atlanta, to see his home, but the way this is set up, it's as if they are going from room to room. I went over there to view it yesterday, and told him he missed his calling. He did such an awesome job with this video, he could be a producer."

The film will be looped to show continuously from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the church's main sanctuary.

At 4 p.m., celebrants will gather at Liberal Memorial Library, 519 N. Kansas Ave., to begin a memorial march up Kansas Ave., turning east on Eighth Street and concluding at the community building in Mahuron Park at Calvert St. The walk, with police support, is "a way for us to remember the March on Birmingham and other nonviolent demonstrations" that were part of the Civil Rights movement 50 years ago, said Moore. He also noted that cooperation from local government entities like the Liberal Police Department and the City of Liberal staff are a welcome sign of how much has changed since King led peaceful protests.

Once at Mahuron Park, visitors will be welcomed to a small information fair, with community leaders set up at individual tables. These will include:

- Dr. Rory Howard, West Point graduate and surgeon at Southwest Medical Center, with information about health issues.
- Rhonda Howard, a board member at Liberal Area Rape Crisis/Domestic Violence Center, with information about women's and family issues, safety and the nonprofit agency.

- Yanique Walters, Family and Consumer Sciences teacher at South Middle School, with information about nutrition.

- Will Ponder, JAG-K specialist at Liberal High School, with information about professionalism, employment skills and youth services.

At Mahuron Park Building, volunteers will also serve chili and hot coffee, which Moore said should provide the perfect antidote for marchers coming in from the cold.

“We hope this is a time of fellowship and support, not only to remember Dr. King but to impress on people that this not just a day to sit at home and do nothing. It should be a day of doing something productive, and this is just a small effort,” Moore said. “I’m hoping Monday may be a jumpstart so that next year will be bigger.”

Moore said the process of organizing the event was in keeping with King’s message about people of all races coming together.

“Jack Jacob did an amazing job of putting the video together, and Joe Denoyer over at KSCB has been a great supporter,” he said. “LPD is escorting us up to a point where there are sections of the march that do not have a sidewalk. So I feel very blessed that the community has gotten behind this.”

All MLK Jr. Day activities are open to the public at no cost.