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NAACP luncheon honors Huntsman Foundation, Rosie Rivera; Elder Stevenson encourages all to ‘build upon our common ground’

NAACP gives Martin Luther King Jr. Award to Huntsman Foundation, Rosa Parks Award to Sheriff Rosie Rivera

By Tad Walch | Jan 21, 2020, 12:56am GMT+1

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Jeanetta Williams, NAACP Salt Lake Branch president, and Elder Gary E. Stevenson, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, chat during the 36th annual Dr. Martin

SALT LAKE CITY — Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called on all people to act as their brother’s keeper during the 36th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Luncheon, sponsored by the NAACP Monday.

The organization honored the Huntsman Foundation and groundbreaking Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera at its annual luncheon, held as the nation celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day across the country.

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Elder Stevenson referred to a comment by the Rev. King, whom he noted was the youngest man to win the Nobel Peace Prize at age 35, that “life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are we doing for others?”

“We hope today to come more closely together in unity to build upon our common ground as brothers and sisters and to do something for others,” Elder Stevenson said at the Little America Hotel in downtown Salt Lake City.



Mack Seiler performs “Glory” during the 36th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Luncheon, hosted by the NAACP Salt Lake Branch, at the Little America Hotel in Salt Lake City on Monday, Jan. 20, 2020. | Kristin Murphy, Deseret News | [Purchase Photo](#)

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Elder Stevenson preceded his remarks by expressing regret that the church’s 2020 “Come, Follow Me” gospel study manual includes an old statement that dark skin in the Book of Mormon was the sign of a curse.

Elder Stevenson disavowed that statement.

“One of our recent church manuals includes a paragraph with some outdated commentary about race,” he said. “It was mistakenly included in the printed version of the manual, which had been prepared for print nearly two years ago. When it was brought to the attention of church leaders late last year, they directed that it be immediately removed in our annual online manual, which is used by the great majority of our members. We have also directed that any future printed manuals will reflect this change.

“We’re asking our members to disregard the paragraph in the printed manual,” he added. “Now I’m deeply saddened and hurt by this error and for any pain that it may have caused our members and for others. I would just like to reiterate our position as a church is clear. We do condemn all racism, past and present, in any form, and we disavow any theory advanced that black or dark skin is a sign of a curse. We are brothers and sisters, and I consider you friends. I love and appreciate you,” he said, drawing applause from those gathered.

Jerri Harwell, associate professor of English at Salt Lake Community College, said Elder Stevenson’s statement was timely, saying the manual was hurtful.

to 16.5 million members. I hope they follow up with it.”

The NAACP Salt Lake Branch’s president, Jeanetta Williams, thanked Elder Stevenson for accepting her invitation to speak and also said Monday’s luncheon was timely.

“This is a crucial time to join the NAACP,” she said. “Every day our civil rights are under attack, and it’s extremely important we recognize the importance of working together.”

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Elder Stevenson noted the deepening friendship and working relationship between the church and the NAACP.

“We thank the NAACP for all that you do to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons,” he said. “We hope today to come more closely together in unity to build upon our common ground as brothers and sisters and to do something for others.”

The church has worked with the NAACP to adapt its self-reliance courses, which the NAACP has successfully conducted in inner-city areas of Chicago and San Francisco. New classes are planned to begin next month in Camden, New Jersey; Terre Haute, Indiana; and Bulloch County, Georgia, according to the Rev. Theresa Dear of the NAACP’s national board of directors.

Elder Stevenson said the church’s leader, President Russell M. Nelson, and the NAACP’s president Derrick Johnson, have linked arms to set an example.

“Engagement with a broader and more diverse community,” he said, “engenders individuals and groups to think outside of themselves. Ignorance dissipates, replaced by acceptance, which grows to understanding, ultimately progressing

He called on people to take three actions — to be their brother’s keeper, to foster civility and to emulate Christ-like love.

Williams presented the 2020 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Award, which honors those who have contributed to the advancement of civil rights in this state, to the Huntsman Foundation.

“The Huntsman Foundation’s principal emphasis is to provide relief to the sick, the poor, the distressed and the underprivileged, as well as promoting education and providing tools for individuals to prosper and to be successful citizens,” she said. “They’ve made a tremendous impact on Utah and the country.”

The Huntsman Foundation was founded in 1988 by the late Jon Huntsman Sr. and his wife, Karen. The foundation’s primary focus has been the Huntsman Cancer Institute, which has improved the quality of treatment for thousands of cancer patient as a world-class research and clinical facility dedicated to finding a cure for cancer.

The foundation also recently announced a \$150 million gift to the University of Utah to fund the Huntsman Mental Health Institute.

David Huntsman called it a great honor to accept the award on behalf of his mother, Karen, and his brothers and sisters.

“Too many people are down or discouraged or denied — in many cases through no fault of their own — the opportunities and the blessings that we enjoy in this very room today, and that’s just not right,” he said. “When my father established this foundation, Jon Huntsman, his charge to the next generation was very simple. He simply told us that every man and woman deserves self respect and dignity, that everyone had a divine nature and that we were all brothers and sisters with a Heavenly Father, and that the best way we serve God is by serving our brothers and sisters.”

Williams presented the NAACP Salt Lake Branch’s 2020 Rosa Parks Award to Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera. Rivera said she was speechless when Williams first told her the branch wanted to honor her in the name of the civil rights icon

“I want to honor her courage and her bravery,” Rivera said, “because many of us wouldn’t be in these situations if we didn’t have people like her to stand up.”

Rivera is the first female sheriff in Utah history. She is the CEO of the Unified Police Department of Greater Salt Lake and oversees the largest jail in the state and the largest court security bureau. She is well-known for mentoring gang-involved youth and advocating for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

“Rosie Rivera has dedicated her life striving to be the best in what law enforcement represents,” Williams said. “Her commitment has brought about great changes in our community. The Rosa Parks award is presented to Rosie Rivera to express our appreciation for her outset and leadership and dedication to her service. We therefore salute your success, your work ethic, your motivation and your fearless attitude toward your career.”

Rivera said she learned from her father that positive change requires action.

“You know, I was 14 years old when I first experienced some discrimination, and I went to my father and the advice he gave me was not to feel sorry for myself, but if I don’t like it, change it,” she said. “So, I did. I put myself in a position where I can make a lot of change, and I have done that for the last 43 years. We still have a lot of work to do. Civil rights is a big issue. Social justice is a big issue, and justice for all is going to come our way.”

Rivera brought her granddaughter, Sabrina, to sit with her on the dais because she wanted to make a statement to young people.

“We need you to get involved,” Rivera said. “We need you to carry this on, because justice for all will happen, but we have to do it as a whole community, we can’t do it by ourselves.”

Williams pointed out that the Rev. King would have turned 91 last week, on Jan. 15.

“We think about what would have been or could have been or what should have been if he was allowed to be with us for just a bit longer,” noted John Huber, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Utah.

“I come to you today on behalf of the United States Department of Justice with a promise that we hope to provide that justice to everyone,” Huber said.

Utah Jazz provided a video that included local sports figures like Donovan Mitchell and national ones like Mike Trout encouraging people to “stand for our teams, but don’t stand for racism.”

“I’m taking the lead, and you can to, and fight against discrimination, inequality, injustice and racism,” the athletes said.

The NAACP Salt Lake Branch presented its First Responders Appreciation Awards to Utah Highway Patrol trooper Ruben Correa, who pulled an unconscious man from a car on the FrontRunner tracks one second before the train struck the car in October. Monday’s audience gave Correa a standing ovation for risking his life to save the driver.

Other first responders honored included Kaysville Police Assistant Chief Seth Ellington; West Valley City police officer Miguel Gamon; American Fork police K-9 officer Reyna Pedro; Cedar City Police Sgt. Clint Pollock; West Jordan police officer Kim Waelty; West Valley City police officer John Wells; Salt Lake City Fire Department Battalion Chief Jeffrey Thomas; and the Salt Lake City Police Department’s Organized Crime Unit — detectives Kurt Jemmett, Jeff Johnson, Kory Olsen, Brandi Palmer, Monica Roop, Edward Verkier and Sgt. Leigh Willis.

Scholarships were awarded by the Larry H. Miller Charities, Smith’s Food & Drug Stores, C.R. England, Hires Big H, Gordon and Connie Hanks, and Shawn and Tory Newell to the following students: Alice Baker, Northern Utah Academy of Math, Engineering and Science; Ariel Chatman, Layton High School; Isabel Cossa, Cyprus High School; Daimion Davis, Skyridge High School; Jaycee Galvin, Salt Lake Community College; Jenessa Jimoh, University of Utah; Jevante Suggs-Gray, Dixie State University; and Tyana Williams, Roseman University.

Others public figures who attended the luncheon included Rep. Ben McAdams, Salt Lake County Attorney Sim Gill, University of Utah President Ruth Watkins, Westminster College President Bethami Dobkin, Salt Lake Community College President Deneece Huftalin, Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson, Salt Lake City

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quoting from Mr. Bushman's book, in year 2005 bio of Prophet Joseph Smith, page 98 on chapter of Book of Mormon, " but the fact that these wild people (in ancient America) are Israel, the chosen of God, adds of level of complexity to the Book of Mormon, that simple racism does not explain.....while the Lamanites are cursed and degraded, they are also at times the most righteous of all the Book of Mormon peoples.....at one point the Nephites become so wicked, a Lamanite prophet calls them to repentance.....in the end, the Lamanites triumph, the white Nephites perish, and the dark Lamanites remain."

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