



West Valley VIEW

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Living the dream

West Valley educator to be honored at Martin Luther King Jr. Day event

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Linda Cutright is living her dream.

She spends her days advising students and teaching psychology at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale. In her spare time, she organizes cultural events, does work for her church and sings.

"Working at the college, I've been able to affect the lives of many students," Cutright said. "It's been such a rewarding feeling."

The Northwest Black History Committee has recognized Cutright's work in the community and decided she is not only living out her dream, but is also living *the* dream.

Cutright was chosen to receive a Living the Dream Award at the 15th annual Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast on Thursday in Peoria.

The award recognizes community leaders who have made a positive impact in their local communities.

"She has encouraged numerous kids to go to school and get their degrees," said Ervin Cutright, chairman of the Northwest Black History Committee. "Not only does she do what she does at the school, but also at church and in the community. That's what was brought to the committee and we decided she was deserving."

As the chairman, Ervin didn't want his sharing of the same last name to discredit the selection, he said. The Cutrights are siblings. There is no denying Linda's passion for all people getting an education, Ervin said.

Focus on education

Cutright has worked at Estrella Mountain Community College for 11 years. Before that, she worked for Agua Fria High School in Avondale.

She was integral in the creation of the Project A.R.M. program for teenage fathers, and has devoted herself to the Genesis West program, which allows students to earn a high school diploma and college credits at the same time.

"It's great to help people find the right pathway as an adviser, and I love to be in the classroom," she said. "Our students are smart."

Cutright was raised in a family of 12. Although she doesn't have children of her own, her office is covered in pictures of young people whose lives she has touched.

"My dad always stressed education for us," she said.

She always knew she would get her education and wanted to be an educator, she said. And the process is ongoing as she is currently working on her Ph.D. in psychology.

Year of special significance

Martin Luther King Jr. said he had a dream that one day people would be judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

"That has taken shape. We have come a long way in this country," Cutright said. "I think awareness has increased, but I don't think we could ever do enough to promote Dr. King's vision."

With the inauguration of the country's first black president this month, Martin Luther King Day takes on a special feeling, Cutright said.

"We have a president-elect who is African American. I don't know that my father and mother would have ever thought that to be possible," Cutright said. "I believed that it would happen."

It's her faith in God and faith in the goodness and strength of people that has driven Cutright.

"I think Martin Luther King Day has tremendous meaning. We are seeing that vision that Dr. King saw," she said. "He lost his life because he wanted to see people treated the same."

Cutright has worked with the Southwest Black History Committee, the Northwest Black History Committee and helped to start Avondale's Cinco de Mayo celebration.

"I've felt blessed to work with all different groups of people," she said.

Cutright will be honored at 7 a.m. Thursday at the Rio Vista Community Park and Recreation Center at 8866 W. Thunderbird Road in Peoria. The event will include a performance by the Soul Stirrers, who are set to perform at the presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C., this month.

"This is quite an honor," Cutright said. "It's very important to me. It means that somebody over the years has recognized the work I have done."

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