The Vineland African American Development Corporation will celebrate the 81st birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King with two major events bringing together key members of the organization and the local community.

The first event is a banquet at North Italy Hall, 414 Virano Lane, Vineland, at 7 p.m. on Dr. King’s actual birthday, Friday, Jan. 15. The second is a free breakfast with speakers and entertainment at Landis Middle School, 63 Landis Ave., Vineland, at 8 a.m. on the national holiday, Monday, Jan. 18.

Labeled “Bridging the Gap,” the two programs “seek to present a rich cultural experience to the residents of Cumberland County,” said Rev. Anthony Scott, president of the Corporation. The banquet Friday night will honor pastors and spouses from the region, and the breakfast on Monday will feature area students in dance performances, including mime and “praise” dancing, and singing.

“The program (Monday) is geared to the youth of the community,” said Rose Spencer, CEO of the Corporation. “It encompasses all grade levels, from elementary through high school.”

Clergy and spouses to be honored at the Friday night banquet are: Pastor Evelyn and William Booze, Bishop Evelyene and Elder Michael Davis, Pastor Isaac and Christine Deshields, Pastor James A. and Marsha Dunkins, Pastor David and C. Starr Ennis, Minister Braheem A. and Latasha Gunther, Pastor David A. and Darlene Hadley Davis, Pastor Benjamin and Naomi Ocasio, Apostle H.M. and Flora Swaringer, and Pastor Thomas and Deborah Whitfield.

Local people supportive of the Corporation’s mission will be recognized at the Monday breakfast. They are: Ardythe-Jackson Evans, Belinda Hall, Williemae Latimore, Bishop Floyd Myrie, Nickolette Frazier, Javona Ford, Darren Ford, Ruben Bermudez, Terrence Spencer, Ivory Buckmon, Michelle Simmons, Dale Moore, Jean Lewis, Michael Trout, Christine Gregory, Rafael Craig, M’Quan Dawkins and Brian Smith.

Tickets for the banquet Friday night are $45 per person. The breakfast Monday morning is free but tickets are required. Reservations for both events may be made by calling (856) 524-4061.

Corporation’s Background

The Corporation, a grant recipient of the Cultural & Heritage Commission since 2004, was founded eight years ago. Its mission is to “create and preserve healthy communities (Continued on next page)
Vineland group celebrates Dr. King’s life

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where low-income people live and work. The Corporation continues to seek ways to improve the quality of life for our distressed neighborhoods.” Specifically, the organization works to improve opportunities in employment through help with job readiness skills; education, including mentoring, seminars and assistance with scholarships; housing, youth development, and health care.

“The Freeholder Board and Commission is honored to be able to assist with the celebrations honoring Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. This is one more reminder of the importance of State history and cultural funding, which is used every day to connect all of us to the legacy of our past and to our greater potential,” said Freeholder Rev. James A. Dunkins, liaison to the Cultural & Heritage Commission.

“The contributions of Dr. King to American history are invaluable and this is one more way to preserve his legacy.”

Its Board of Directors, which meets the first Wednesday of each month, consists of clergy, health care professionals, educators and others. For more information on the organization, call (856) 297-4705.

Highlights of Dr. King’s life

Martin Luther King, Jr. (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968) was an American clergyman, activist and prominent leader in the African-American civil rights movement. His main legacy was to secure progress on civil rights in the United States.

A Baptist minister, King became a civil rights activist early in his career. He led the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, serving as its first president. King’s efforts led to the 1963 March on Washington, where King delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech. There, he raised public consciousness of the civil rights movement and established himself as one of the greatest orators in U.S. history.

In 1964, King became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to end racial segregation and racial discrimination through civil disobedience and other non-violent means. By the time of his death in 1968, he had refocused his efforts on ending poverty and opposing the Vietnam War, both from a religious perspective. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977 and Congressional Gold Medal in 2004; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was established as a U.S. national holiday in 1986.

He was born in Atlanta, Georgia., the son of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King. His father was born “Michael King,” and Martin Luther King, Jr., was originally named “Michael King, Jr.,” until the family traveled to Europe in 1934 and visited Germany. His father soon changed both of their names to Martin Luther in honor of the German Protestant leader Martin Luther. King sang with his church choir at the 1939 Atlanta premiere of the movie Gone with the Wind.

King is perhaps most famous for his “I Have a Dream” speech, given in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The speech electrified the crowd. It is regarded, along with Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Infamy Speech, as one of the finest speeches in the history of American oratory.