



By John Harris Jr. VILLAGER Reporter

Say “Hey!” to MLK Day



MLK Day attendees. Photo/John Harris Jr.

(VILLAGER) - When Na’Cole Thompson moved to Leander in 2003, “there were probably about 10,000 people. We considered it the boondocks. You passed a bunch of cows and horses and farms.”

Much has changed in the two decades since.

“Now we’re at a population of over 80,000,” said Thompson, a city council member responsible for the birth of Leander’s second annual MLK Day March and Celebration that was attended by approximately 2,000 local residents Monday. “Now it’s all development. It’s all business. It’s all shopping areas. It’s a huge change.”

More than just a viable backyard option for Leander residents who don’t want to fight the traffic and travel into Austin to attend the longstanding annual MLK Day event originating at the University of Texas and ending at Huston-Tillotson, Leander’s version is becoming the place to be.

About 500 people traveled the march’s route from Camacho Elementary to Old Town Park, where entertainment, speeches by local dignitaries, and vendor booths and food trucks dominated the area.

“I’m a native Austinite, so I’ve always done the MLK Day events in Austin,” said Thompson, elected to Leander’s city council in June 2021. “When I got elected, I was like, you know, I probably should go to the one in my community only to find there wasn’t one in my community.”



Leander city council member Na’Cole Thompson. Photo/John Harris Jr.

“African Americans make up almost six percent of the population in Leander right now. Our median income is \$117,000 for families. After I got elected and realized there wasn’t an event out here, I said I can help change that. I got all the powers that be, because now I have a seat at the table and can get the police chief and the fire chief and the city manager and the mayor all in a room

and say I want to do this, will you all support this. And they all said absolutely. They all came together.”

Kerry Stevens said Thompson, co-president of the Austin Black Democratic Club, united a diverse community that continues to undergo a racial facelift.

“I’ve been here since 1984. When I got here, it was a bunch of old white people,” said



Travis County Democratic Party Precinct Chair Kerry Stevens (center) joined by Maureen Saval (left) and Carol Beatty. Photo/John Harris Jr.

Stevens, Travis County Democratic Party Precinct Chair #393. “You can look around and that’s not the case anymore today. We now have people of color in positions of leadership for the city and the school board that we didn’t used to have. Na’ Cole spearheaded all of this. If it had not been for her, I suspect we still wouldn’t be having this today. She spearheaded it, and the city’s embraced it.”

“It’s nice to be able to sing the Negro National Anthem, be able to have prayers from African American pastors, and just for people to see our community,” Thompson said. “We can see the demographics shift and people are moving to these suburban areas. Austin has become a very expensive place to live. The school districts in these areas, you don’t have to necessarily send

your kids to private school; you can still get a good education. So, I understand why people are moving further out. But as they’re living out here, we want to give them something they can participate in and not have to drive 30 miles into Austin to feel like they’re celebrating and honoring (MLK Day).”

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Create & Heal: The Art of Drumming

Thursday, February 2, 2023 - 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center | 1165 Angelina Street, Austin, TX 78702



(AUSTIN, TX) - Master drummers Armando Martin of "Spirit of the Drum" will lead a healing and celebration workshop for beginners and novice drummers. Attendees will learn basic drumming rhythms and participate in an African drumming circle. Participants are asked to bring their own conga or djembe drums. The Carrver will have a limited number of drums to reserve, first come first serve. Visit RSVP link to reserve.

A native of Panama City, Panama, Armando and his family emigrated to the United States during the mid 1960’s and settled in the Bronx, N.Y. It was during his freshman year of high school in 1972, that he developed an interest in playing the Conga

Drum. One day a Salsa band came to perform at his school during the lunch hour, where coincidentally Armando was working as a stage hand. While standing behind the Conga player, he realized he that was incredibly fascinated by the instrument. It was not until 2006, that he finally decided to pursue his lifelong dream, and learned to play the congas. He has been a student of the drum for the past 17 years and has never looked back. Playing his drums have been therapeutic and more than simply what he does... it is a part of who he is.

In 2008 he and fellow musicians James Jenner and Rick Blakey formed the Drum group “Spirit of the Drum”. You can see them in the annual

Juneteenth Parade, and at their monthly jam session in Mueller Park.

With special guest Jill Henderson from the Bakari Foundation. The Bakari Foundation is a 501 (c)3, nonprofit organization based out of Austin, TX. Their vision strives to bring about healing, peace, and clarity for families in mourning; while honoring the life of Bakari Henderson. The Bakari Foundation’s mission is to provide transformative travel experiences for families who have lost loved ones at the hands of another. The Carver Museum is honored to be working in tandem with the Bakari Foundation during Black History month and beyond for our program, Create & Heal.