

Norristown man honored at MLK awards ceremony

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Norristown fire fighter Brian Bell (center) is the recipient of the “Living the Dream” Award during the Norristown Recreation Committee’s Martin Luther King Jr. “Living the Dream” program at Norristown Municipal Hall, Jan. 16, 2012. Presenting the award is Left Norristown Councilman Gary Simpson and Norristown Park & Recreation Director Bill Plichta. Photo by Gene Walsh / Times Herald Staff.

NORRISTOWN — More than 300 people attended the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Living the Dream” awards ceremony, which recognized a local man for achievements in civil service at borough hall Monday night.

Sponsored by the Norristown Recreation Committee, the awards ceremony, in its 15th year, recognized Brian Wayne Bell, of Norristown. The ceremony commenced with the vocal stylings of Carrie Porter, which had the crowd swaying, with accompaniment by the Mount Zion Male Chorus.

Bell was touted for his work as a safety officer for the Norristown Fire Department and for his work on the investigating committee. He also worked as a hazardous material technician for Montgomery County and a fire police captain for Lincoln Fire Company. He now serves on the executive board of the fire police in Norristown.

Born in Philadelphia in 1962, Bell was raised in Germantown and moved to Norristown in 1987. After extensive training, Bell became a firefighter and later a crew chief for Fairmount Fire Company. For three terms he has served as the trustee chairman. Also a member of the Norristown Recreation Committee, where he has served for eight years, he also works with Steve Ferguson Entertainment for the summer concert series at MLK Park.

A man of few words, Bell graciously accepted a citation on behalf of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, which was delivered by State Rep. Matt Bradford (D-70th of Montgomery County).

“Thank you to the pioneers, 25 years ago, who made Dr. King a reality in Norristown,” said Bradford.

“Tonight is really special for Brian, in recognizing all he’s done for the fire service and the community.”

President of Norristown Council, Gary Simpson, offered some kind words about King and Bell.

“This night is not just for people of color, but for people in general,” he said.

“One of the greatest things I get to do is recognize people who helped bring that kind of vision — a monument for Norristown to show who Dr. King was.”

Members of the recreation committee who help bring the MLK monument to Norristown were also recognized and presented with a plaque. They included Rich Rogers, Robert Wright, Francis Lawrence, Jim Randolph, Carrie Darden, Peter Barbone and Sal Gambone.

“Having spent nine years here in Norristown, being a part of this effort in its early days, it is a joy to see it come to completion,” said The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Leath, former pastor of Mt. Zion AME Church in Norristown.

“It’s significant that in Norristown, the effort was not to name a street after MLK Jr. — streets don’t do much. They just sit. There’s not a statue or a plaque. The King monument was designed from the very beginning to be alive, where people would gather, where there would be singing and speaking and the voice of the people would be heard and go out.

“The inspiration of those who received various awards, is to encourage each of us, from the smallest to the greatest, to speak out — to speak out for truth. We want to encourage you not to be silent, but to be one who speaks. Shatter the silence the world has lulled us into and be a voice for that which is of meaning.”

Also in attendance Monday night was the very first African American judge in Montgomery County, Horace C. Davenport.