

Kingsport marchers hope city will soon name street after Martin Luther King Jr. Kevin Castle. Kingsport Times-News. January 15, 2007.

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By KEVIN CASTLE

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The Rev. Matthew Thomas, center, and other members of the Greater Kingsport Ministerial Association address a group of marchers in the parking lot at City Hall after Monday's Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade through downtown Kingsport. Photo by David Grace.

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KINGSPORT - His impact on the civil rights movement was felt worldwide, but Pastor Ron Collins says the legacy of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. hasn't fully resonated in Kingsport - 38 years after King's death.

Until recently, the suggestion that a Kingsport street be named after King hadn't garnered much support since Collins and a handful of supporters held their first Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade here in 1996.

But their efforts may now pay off, Collins said Monday, when he spoke of a meeting held last week with Kingsport Mayor Dennis Phillips.

"We are trying to open up communication (with city leaders) relative to a street naming here in the area, and we came up with some ideas. I believe within the next month or so we will be communicating more with the mayor, and I am certain that something will happen. I'm positive," Collins said just before he joined other marchers on Monday.

Cody Hilderbrant was one of the marchers.

"I came here today to tear down the dividing walls of racism in this town," he said.

"Ever since I was young, I was raised in a racist environment where inappropriate comments were made, and I didn't appreciate them. And nowadays, we have churches that are either all white or all black, and that's got to change. We all have to mix and come together."

Jennabelle Bristol was a small child in Rogersville when a bullet fired from a nearby building struck and killed King on a balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

"The only thing I remember was that was a sad, sad day. A lot of people shed tears at a senseless tragedy," she said.

"Kingsport is doing a lot toward (Dr. King's) dream coming true. I know that people here are working harder to make things right in that sense, so I came out because the more I read about Dr. King and his ideas, the more I appreciate him. Maybe us marching will bring home that this city needs unity."

Although satisfied by the gathering Monday, Collins said he hopes the parade will gain more participants in future walks, including more from the youth contingent.

"We would like to coordinate something with the city school system. That's our next step," he said.

"If we can send a marching band to California to march in a parade, why can't our young folks be involved in a march like this in their hometown? We need to get the youth more involved because they are the ones who will continue this."

"The Coretta Scott Kings and Rosa Parks of the world are gone now. Our children will have to pick up where we have left off, and the only way to start that tradition is have them involved."

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