

Durham man honored with two lifetime service awards

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Few people can claim the honor of receiving a lifetime service award, but Durham local Warren L. Herndon was awarded two on the same day.

Both awards were presented on Martin Luther King Jr. Day to celebrate Herndon's more than 30 years of leadership in civil rights history, community service and social justice advocacy. Mayor Steve Schewel presented The Longevity and Distinguished Service award to Herndon at The Tower at Mutual Plaza, and Rep. David Price gave him The Clergy Leadership, Humanities and Missions Award at First Presbyterian Church.

Herndon is a senior associate minister and retired senior level administrator from Duke University Medical Center. He said these awards are especially meaningful to him, due to his doctor's recent medical advice to pull back from such a stressful schedule.

"As I have transformed over the years, it has been my faith, my educational pursuit and my scholarly desire that has been able to bring social justice full circle," he said. "I was humbled and walk with gratitude at the sense of love, kindness and acknowledgment for me to be used as a vessel to keep the history of the life and legacy alive."

Schewel said the Longevity and Distinguished Service Award was created specifically to honor Herndon's service in the community, and that he wanted to present the award to him on MLK Day because of how instrumental Herndon has been in organizing community and educational events for the holiday.

"One of the things that makes Dr. Herndon special is that he reaches broadly," Schewel said. "He is inclusive in his approach, regardless of race or religion, and that makes his service to the community special."

Since moving to Durham with his family in 1968, Herndon has been influential in his community. He has dedicated his efforts to reducing homelessness and poverty, and worked closely on the Durham Human Relations Commission for over 25 years. He served on the Durham Merchants Association for more than 15 years, traveled as a human rights delegate to five international meetings and was a candidate for Durham City Council and Durham Community Commission.

As a graduate from North Carolina Central University and an adjunct lec-



Warren Herndon was presented with the Longevity and Distinguished Service Award, created specifically to honor his commitment to Durham. (Staff photo by Hannah McClellan)

turer at both NCCU and Duke, Herndon is a committed scholar. He is passionate about Durham's past – particularly its African American history – and knows the background of nearly every landmark in downtown Durham. Herndon is particularly interested in the history of Martin Luther King Jr.'s visits to Durham, which he knows quite a bit about despite the lack of a historical marker downtown where King walked.

Herndon also emphasized the mentors in his life who encouraged him and helped him grow as a leader. He cited the late Hendrik Van Dijk, who he met when he was 19 years old, Elroy Lewis, retired bishop at Fisher Memorial United Holy Church of American and Joe Harvard, retired pastor at First Presbyterian Church, who mentored him for over 20 years. And of course, he said Martin Luther King Jr. inspired him through his work and teachings.

As someone who saw mentorship positively impact his own life, Herndon said doing the same for others is an important part of his service to the community. He has been an adviser for 30 years in The Rites of Passage, a program by The Durham Business & Professional Chain with NCCU that provides mentoring

experiences for young black men who come primarily from single-parent homes. The program ultimately aims to reduce violence by providing positive information about African American history and culture to improve racial and cultural pride.

Lois Mayfield is a teacher's assistant at Oak Grove Elementary with a fourth grade special needs program. She has known Herndon for over 10 years, after meeting him at their church. She joined the Rites of Passage program with her son, Bushido Mayfield, when he was 12. Now he's 18, and said Herndon has mentored him all his life.

"It's a life saver. There's doctors, professors – men of elite – and they have been with the program for years, and they do it without pay, and they give of their time, of their talent," Lois said. "They're reaching out and trying to make a difference in the community, to help young boys to go on the straight and narrow – to capture them before it's late, rather than after the fact."

While Herndon will be taking a step back due to medical advice, he will continue to be a mentor at The Rites of Passage. Along with plans to teach a history course on Durham at Duke, Herndon hopes to get back to doing things that will improve his well-being.