



HAUPPAUGE. The Rev. Calvin Butts, left, keynote speaker at yesterday's annual King Day breakfast, greets John White, his wife, Sonia, and their son, Aaron.



LONG BEACH. Tuskegee Airman Julius Freeman, grand marshal of the city parade, rides in a van along Park Avenue.

A push to carry on MLK dream

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The Rev. Calvin O. Butts, president of SUNY Old Westbury, yesterday urged a Martin Luther King Day audience that included some of Suffolk's top politicians to carry on the slain civil rights leader's dream for a "rebirth" of the nation.

Among those in the crowd of more than 700 at the event in Hauppauge was John White, the Miller Place man whose 2-4-year sentence for the racially charged killing of a Selden teen was commuted last month by then-Gov. David A. Paterson. White, who was not acknowledged from the dais by any of the speakers, had attended the event in the past.

The 26th annual breakfast sponsored by the First Baptist Church of Riverhead featured a keynote speech by Butts, also senior pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. The event drew numerous groups, along with Reps. Steve Israel (D-Dix Hills) and Tim Bishop (D-Southampton), Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy and Babylon Town Supervisor Steve Bellone, the presumed Democratic front-runner to take on Levy, a Republican, later this year.

Butts said to achieve the country's "rebirth" and continue King's dream of equality for all, everyone needs to work harder to improve communication and understanding between different races, expand political power of blacks, improve education and strengthen community development organizations.

"Those are grassroots things," Butts said. "In order for America to be reborn we have to continue to work on it, push. What we see is the baby coming. With the election of Obama, diverse audiences, these are the harbingers of the new day. But we have to push, and the push involves blood and pain, but we must do it."

William Hutley, a retired beer delivery driver from Amityville who was in the audience, said he would keep pushing. "We've made gains but we need to keep striving," he said. "It's always good to hear reminders."

Israel also echoed the call for unity. "It comes without fearing each other, it comes without separating each other between blue versus red, rich against poor. It comes without calling each other traitor, socialist and liar," he said.

White was among those who gave high marks to Butts' speech in particular. "What's real is real," White said. "America has not learned to face the situation of discrimination in this country, they have not learned to deal with it."

Before the event, White milled about in the lower level of the Hyatt Regency Wind Watch

Hotel and greeted well-wishers. White, who is black, shot Daniel Cicciaro Jr., 17, who is white, in a confrontation outside White's house on Aug. 9, 2006.

"I want to try to thank people who supported me," said White, who was joined by his wife, Sonia, and son, Aaron. "I haven't seen some people for a while."

One of those well-wishers, Nathan McCain of Jamaica, Queens, said he was glad to see White was out and getting on with his life. "Everyone should leave him alone and let him live his life," McCain said.

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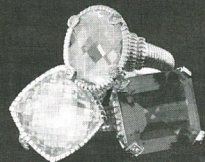
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