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Banquet honors Dr. King

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Standing tall and proud before a backdrop of vibrant African tapestries, speakers of all races read the inspiring words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. last night.

The audience was breathlessly silent, for the words rang true much as they did during the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

And that is what made the 23rd annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Banquet so special, said Banquet Committee Chairwoman Grace Hampton.

"Many times, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday is celebrated with a speaker who interprets Dr. King's words," Hampton said, "but the unique thing about tonight's program (was) that we (heard) the actual words of Martin Luther King."

The banquet was presented by the University's Forum on Black Affairs at the Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel. The event was sold out with more than 500 people in attendance, said Andrew Jackson, president of the Forum on Black Affairs.

Complete with musical selections, speeches and awards given in the spirit of King's values, the banquet's theme was "A Celebration of the Life and Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

"(King's) legacy will survive in years to come because all the things he talked about then are still relevant today," Jackson said.

The night opened with "The Black National Anthem" and continued to use music as a major theme throughout the night.

The music ensemble Jason Yates and Friends, performed a soulful rendition of "We Shall Overcome."

Group member Jama Greene (sophomore-division of undergraduate studies) said, "A lot of people are speaking (tonight) about what we can do to continue the accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and honor his achievements, and we are doing the same thing in a different way (by singing)."

The musical theme was furthered later in the evening by Terri Dowdy, who enraptured the audience with her vocal range and powerful emotion.

"Singing here tonight means an

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awful lot to me," Dowdy said. "All the opportunities I've had in my life are largely due to the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. My hope is that I can help somebody through my singing."

Koy Miller (freshman-film and video production) attended the banquet and said she thinks King is still very influential in today's society.

"I think, like most people do, that he was a great man," Miller said. "And I think he would be happy with how far we've come so far and curious about how far we'll go in the future."