

## Fellowship, Service & Free Hugs at MLK Day 2017



*Students, faculty and staff volunteered their time to make blankets for children in foster care and area hospitals.*

MLK Day 2017 at West Chester University began with a rousing performance of the WCU Gospel Choir at brunch and ended with a presentation from Ken E. Nwadike, Jr., a peace activist and social media sensation who created the Free Hugs Project. In-between, activities included a presentation by health

education coordinator and WCU alumnus Antar Bush, a blanket-making service project, and a soul food dinner.

“WCU’s MLK Day provides an opportunity for the Chester County community to observe the birthday of Dr. King and re-dedicate ourselves to the principles of social justice which he espoused,” says Jerome “Skip” Hutson, director of the Lawrence A. Dowdy Multicultural Center. “I was very pleased with the strong turn-out and enthusiastic response. The brunch sold out and the service project also drew significant crowds. Even our evening keynote speaker, Ken Nwadike, took the time to join in the afternoon blanket-making session,” notes Hutson.

Kate Colyer, interim assistant director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs reports that more than 500 volunteers – primarily students but also faculty, staff and members of the community – participated in two volunteer work sessions. In all, 110 fuzzy fleece blankets were made for children at A.I. DuPont Hospital for Children, the Abramson Cancer Center at Chester County Hospital, and Fleece for Keeps, an organization that provides blankets to children in the foster care system.

“At the work sessions, we encouraged participants to be active citizens through service long after MLK Day has past,” says Colyer. “We invited students to attend the Spring Volunteer Fair and find out more ways to get involved. Speakers from the partnering agencies also encouraged them to volunteer at their organizations.”

At the morning brunch, which was sponsored by the Frederick Douglass Society, the 2017 Drum Majors for Justice were announced. The award is presented to alumni who have distinguished themselves in their profession or with their community service. This year’s honorees are brothers Suni Blackwell ’03 and Shariff Blackwell ’03 and James Lindsay ’97.

The title Drum Major for Justice is taken from one of Dr. King’s sermons:

*“If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don’t want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. ... If you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness.”*

The Blackwell brothers launched C.B.S. United, Inc., a nonprofit organization that serves and empowers adults and youth in Delaware County and Philadelphia, offering mentorship, scholarship, life skills, and employment/networking resources. The organization conducts diabetes awareness events, back-to-school book bag drives and toy drives, as well as supports juvenile diabetes research.

James Lindsay was recognized for his work as a re-entry parole officer specialist for the past 20 years and for his positive impact on thousands of individuals who re-enter the community following incarceration. His unit provides a bridge for offenders, helping smooth the transition by connecting parolees with services as well as with mentors, employers, and landlords.