

## Unity, progress called for at MLK dinner



**CAPTION:** Dan Schneider/Daily Mining Gazette

**Members of a gospel choir assembled for the Martin Luther King Dinner at Michigan Technological University sing at the event on Saturday. The event included an address by a state representative from Detroit.**

By **DAN SCHNEIDER**, DMG Writer

**HOUGHTON** — State Rep. George Cushingberry wore a Huskies jersey with his name stretched across the back, but he didn't come to Houghton to talk hockey.

As keynote speaker at Michigan Technological University's Martin Luther King Dinner Saturday, Cushingberry came to talk about King's legacy and the steps America still needs to take to fulfill King's vision.

"The attitude of 'If you're white, you're all right, if you're black, get back,' America's got to kick that if we want to succeed," Cushingberry said.

He said the state and nation have to get rid of persistent attitudes that continue to hold minorities back in the business world.

"Maybe the corporate world needs to listen, it might make some more money if it had a few more of us in it," Cushingberry said.

State Rep. Mike Lahti, D-Hancock, introduced Cushingberry, D-Detroit, as a graduate of Cass Tech high school, which drew cheers from Cass Tech alums in the audience. Cushingberry holds bachelor's degrees in black studies and political science and a master's degree in political science, urban politics, policy and administration, both from Wayne State University.

Cushingberry is also a Baptist minister, and during parts of his speech he brought the flavor of the pulpit to Tech's podium.

He called for unity to move the state forward.

"We gotta recognize that this is one Michigan from Ishpeming and Hancock to Monroe and Detroit," Cushingberry said. "One Michigan working together to improve the economy for all of us. One Michigan that dares to stand up and give a hand up, we don't need a hand-out."

He called for people living in affluent suburbs to develop a genuine concern, empathy and willingness to help those living in the inner cities.

He called for a shift of national priorities toward domestic issues, including one which particularly resonated with the students in attendance.

"Our country's got to do something about strapping all our students with \$50,000 in debt," Cushingberry said. "If we can spend three billion in Iraq, can't we find some way to spend three-hundred-million to relieve some of our students so they don't have to start out in the world in the hole?"

To this end, he suggested a program under which college graduates could work in inner cities in exchange for tuition debt forgiveness.

"It ain't going to break the United States," Cushingberry said.

Most of all, he called for people in general to break down the cultural barriers that still exist between people of different races, and which prevent minorities from getting fair consideration.

"The youngest ones that you are holding back because you don't understand they hip-hop, you might be holding back the best and the brightest ones," Cushingberry said. "You will see that they will make great contributions to the future of our society."

He said evolutionarily, all humans share an ancestor.

"The fact is, we all the same folk, we come from the same stock, so lets start acting like it," Cushingberry said.

A moment of silence was held for Inetta Harris before Cushingberry's speech. The former director of Tech's ECHOES From Heaven gospel choir passed away Jan. 14.

Then a small gospel choir assembled just for Saturday night sang a few numbers, in honor of both

Harris and King.

Following Cushingberry's speech, Tech's Black Student Association president Wayne Abraham gave a special tribute to Betty Chavis, director of outreach and multi-ethnic programs at Tech's Office of Educational Opportunity. He said Chavis has been instrumental in providing black students with a positive experience at Tech.

"An icon is defined as an image or symbolic representation, often with sacred significance," Abraham said. "I can think of no better description for Miss Betty Chavis, a woman who is a pillar of the MTU community and the reason many of us in this room tonight have chosen to attend Michigan Tech."

Abraham then presented Chavis with two framed pieces of art by Black Student Association Vice President Shawyn Tabb.

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