

## David Pinkowitz

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**Sent:** Sunday, January 14, 2024 11:45 AM  
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**Subject:** Newsday . . Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Abraham's Table brings birthday celebration to Commack SYJCC



LONG ISLAND **SUFFOLK ONLY IN NEWSDAY**

# Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Abraham's Table brings birthday celebration to Commack SYJCC



*Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. addresses a rally in Selma, Alabama, on Feb. 22, 1966. Credit: AP*

**By Olivia Winslow** [olivia.winslow@newsday.com](mailto:olivia.winslow@newsday.com) [@newsollie](https://www.instagram.com/newsollie) Updated January 14, 2024 6:53 am

Abraham's Table of Long Island will present a Martin Luther King Jr. birthday program on Monday infused with dancing and singing to foster

the civil rights icon's vision of “the beloved community” in which everyone is cared for, organizers said.

The Suffolk Y Jewish Community Center in Commack will host the event, said Richard Koubek, chair of Abraham's Table, an interfaith group of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

“We said, 'Why don't we just come together and celebrate the importance of being at peace amid all this hate, particularly being at peace in service to other people?' ” Koubek said. He described the program as a way for groups sometimes separated by race or religion to “break out of our silos.”

Discussions gave rise to a theme for the King celebration: “Coming Together in Peace at a Time of Hate.”

## WHAT TO KNOW

- **Abraham's Table of Long Island**, an interfaith group of Jews, Christians and Muslims, is hosting a multicultural program with singing and dancing to celebrate the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday on Monday.
- **The program's theme** is “Coming Together in Peace at a Time of Hate.”
- **The interfaith group's program** will take place at the Suffolk Y Jewish Community Center in Commack.

Koubek said a broad spectrum of hateful incidents preceded the war in Gaza that followed Hamas' attacks on Israel on Oct. 7.



*"You can be with people who are different and find that commonality. That's called humanity,"*

*said Richard Koubek, chair of Abraham's Table, an interfaith group. Credit: Rick Kopstein*

Since the Mideast conflict erupted, rising antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents have been reported in the United States. The Council on American-Islamic Relations said it received 2,171 complaints nationwide of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian bias incidents from Oct. 7 through Dec. 2.

In the three months since the attacks, U.S. antisemitic incidents — including physical assaults and written or verbal harassment — have skyrocketed, according to the Anti-Defamation League's preliminary data. A total of 3,283 incidents were reported between Oct. 7 and Jan. 7, which the ADL said was a 360% increase compared to the same period one year ago when there were 712 incidents.

An advocate of the early 20th century philosophy “beloved community,” King believed the term meant “a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth,” according to the King Center in Atlanta. The civil rights icon was assassinated in 1968.

King's birthday is an ideal time, said Koubek, to focus on the aspirational meaning of that message: of building communities where everyone counts — the poor, the hungry, the marginalized — and there is justice for all.

Abraham's Table started a Beloved Community Project in 2022, and Monday's King celebration is an outgrowth, Koubek said. The project has included hearing from "victims of hate" across various religions, races and ethnicities. Training sessions have focused on how to deal with online hate and "implicit bias," and helping congregations develop a "tool kit" when "something hateful happens," Koubek said.

## Coming together

The group's King program is about people coming together, despite "misunderstandings and disagreements," as one organizer put it.

It will include a Mexican dance troupe, a Korean "drum dance," Jewish cantors and a Jewish prayer for healing, as well as Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim prayers. An Irish peace poem called "Shaking Hands," about the peace process in Northern Ireland, will be recited.



*All religions are welcome to join the MLK celebration "because we are one people," said Bat-Sheva Slavin, a vice chair of Abraham's Table. Credit: Rick Kopstein*

Rick Lewis, Suffolk Y JCC's chief executive, said of the interfaith group's King program: "I love everything about it. When we bring a variety of faiths together, it's very important we try to touch on everybody's sense of celebration ... make sure everybody's comfort level is reached."

King, “was one of the original people to get us all together ... and not dividing us,” Lewis said. “That’s truly the goal of the day” and will help “improve our world, improve our government.”

Anytime, but especially on King’s birthday, “We invite all religions to come join us, because we are one people, even though we have misunderstandings and disagreements,” said Bat-Sheva Slavin, a vice chair of Abraham’s Table and director of Jewish Living and Learning at the Suffolk Y JCC.

“There is no other way,” Slavin added, “we have to strive to stop hate.”

The program’s emphasis on music and dancing “means we can stand together on the same platform, literally on the same stage. In every language, every culture, we can sing about love. We can sing about understanding,” Slavin said.



*“Let’s do music, dancing and prayer sessions to uplift the people” to celebrate Martin Luther King’s birthday, said Sadri Altinok. Credit: Barry Sloan*

## **'Uplift the people'**

Similarly, Sadri Altinok, the other vice chair of Abraham’s Table and president of the Turkish Cultural Center in Ronkonkoma, noted the division engulfing the world, such as the Mideast strife. “Let’s do music, dancing and prayer sessions to uplift the people,” Altinok said.

King's focus on "loving the hater" appealed to Altinok.

"As much as there's hate and polarization outside," Altinok said, "there is still hope, a strong bonding."

Koubek said organizers intentionally focused the program on bringing different groups together. A Korean American singer will perform "Lift Every Voice and Sing," commonly called the Black national anthem, backed by a gospel choir.

"It's going to capture what we hope is the spirit of the evening, [which] is that we come out of our silos, the places where we're comfortable," Koubek said. "We need to get out of that particular corner of the world and see that we can connect with other people who are different."

He said the program would end with King's "very challenging" concept of loving those who hate.

"You can be with people who are different and find that commonality. That's called humanity," Koubek said. "That's the beloved community."

Abraham's Table's MLK celebration is scheduled to take place from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Monday at the Suffolk Y Jewish Community Center, 74 Hauppauge Rd., Commack. Because of security concerns, anyone wishing to attend must register in advance, either online at [syjcc.org](http://syjcc.org), or by calling 631-462-9800, Ext. 0.



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*"We must learn to live together  
as brothers (and sisters)  
or perish together as fools"*  
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## MLK Day 2024 at the Suffolk Y JCC

Monday, January 15, 2024 | 4:00 pm  
74 Hauppauge Rd, Commack, NY 11725

### *Shalom, Pax, Salaam...Coming Together in Peace in a Time of Hate*



**A Martin Luther King Interfaith Cultural Event**  
with the Suffolk Y JCC & Abraham's Table

Amid an alarming rise in hate speech  
and crimes on Long Island and worldwide,  
**join us as we come together**  
for interfaith prayers, reflections, poetry,  
music & dance for healing & peace.

For more information  
or to register:



For more events in your community  
go to [www.abrahamstableli.org](http://www.abrahamstableli.org)

FREE & open to the community. Registration required. For help with registration call: 631.462.9800 x0

**Questions? Contact:** Bat-Sheva Slavin, 631.462.9800 x140 | [bslavin@syjcc.org](mailto:bslavin@syjcc.org)



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