

PRESS RELEASE Human Rights Advocates of Coos County January 1, 2023 Bittin Duggan,
CHW, MA, BFA HRACC Member, 541-217-4095
HumanRightsAdvocatesCC@gmail.com

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebrations 2023

**IT STARTS WITH ME: CULTIVATING
A BELOVED COMMUNITY MINDSET**

Coos County Community Events at Pony Village Mall & Virtual Events

MLK & Award Event: Monday, January 16, 1 - 3 pm

Student Art Exhibit: Sat, Jan. 14 - Sun, Jan 29. 10 am - 8 pm, M-Sat., 10 am - 6pm, Sun.

Virtual links: Begin January 14th

NORTH BEND/COOS BAY, OR. — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday is celebrated in 2023 with the King Center's weeklong tribute to Dr. King - 'IT STARTS WITH ME: CULTIVATING A BELOVED COMMUNITY MINDSET TO TRANSFORM UNJUST SYSTEMS'. In Coos County we focus on cultivating a beloved community through events and virtual links during the month of January. On Monday, January 16th, messages from MLK will be shared along with the presentation of the Seventeenth Annual 'Lilah Bidwell Human Dignity Award'. This year's award will be given to Danny Stoddard to recognize his decades of service. Additionally, artwork created by local students and inspired by MLK's legacy of peace and non-violence will be on display in the Pony Village Mall hallway from Saturday, January 14 through Sunday, January 29th.

The legacy of Lilah Bidwell is honored in this celebration each year as her decades of selfless volunteerism was the epitome of community cultivation. She was also one of the founding members of the Human Rights Advocates of Coos County over forty years ago. The award named in her honor is given each year to someone who embodies this same spirit. Raised in Coos County, Danny Stoddard, began his volunteer service at the South Slough in the 1990s. He has continued with decades of commitment to those housed differently and to vulnerable populations. This includes years of military service, during which he was awarded the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for his work with international disaster relief and those suffering from poverty. He also has volunteered while living in Portland with the Central City Concern, serving the houseless and those experiencing addiction; and while in Brooklyn, New York with poverty fighting organizations. He currently serves on the Citizen Review Board for Coos County, a program within the Oregon Judicial Department and with influence over the lives of the nearly 300 youth in foster care in Coos County. He has also served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate within Coos County and is on the Board of Directors for the Bob Belloni Ranch and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee for the Coos Bay School District. In addition to all this he works passionately as an advocate for individuals with disabilities in his professional role with the Star of Hope.

Please explore our full offerings this month and help celebrate the momentum of individual and collective social justice actions for humanity and the environment that continue to gain traction in the world. You will learn how the legacy of Dr. King continues to inspire.

Additional information is found at: The King Center in Georgia- <https://thekingcenter.org>; The University of Michigan - <https://oami.umich.edu/um-mlk-symposium/events/>; The Atlanta History Museum - <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/event/martin-luther-king-jr-day-2023/>; Georgia Tech: <https://diversity.gatech.edu/2023-mlk-celebration-and-commemorative-event-series>;

2023 Lilah Bidwell Human Dignity Award Winner: Danny Stoddard

“Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” — Martin Luther King Jr

Danny was raised in Coos Bay by his Mother, Linda, along with two brothers and three sisters. He attended Blossom Gulch Elementary, Sunset Middle School, and graduated from Marshfield High School in 1993. He entered the United States Navy shortly after and spent nearly a decade serving honorably until he returned home to continue raising his son, Michael, near family.

He has always felt an awareness of the need to help others. In his middle school years it was speaking up to the school district administration about the inequity in access to education brought by the lack of school bussing. In high school he shared his passion for education, volunteering at the South Slough Estuarine Reserve to teach the history portion for elementary school field trips.

While serving in the Navy, Danny organized and led many community service events with his fellow Sailors and Marines. This included assisting organizations that helped the homeless, blind, and those with developmental disabilities. While deployed overseas Danny both organized and participated in service projects aiding international disaster relief and those living with extreme poverty. This work culminated in his receiving the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, along with contributing to his receiving two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals.

After moving back to Coos County in 2004, Danny spent the next decade in service to vulnerable youth as a Court Appointed Special Advocate, a literacy volunteer at Blossom Gulch, and volunteering with the resource center for homeless youth and families formerly known as the Maslow Project of Coos County. Following this, Danny relocated to the Portland area where he worked at the Springdale Job Corps Center, continuing his path of service both with his students and in the larger community. This was done through service projects with his students and at both the Central City Concern, working with the houseless or those experiencing addiction; and at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, where he proudly led educational tours aboard the USS BLUEBACK, a retired United States Navy diesel submarine. With a promotion to New York City, Danny continued his work with his students by volunteering with organizations that assisted both vulnerable youth and providing resources to homeless teenage mothers.

Having gone too far from his family and desiring to come home, Danny returned to Coos Bay in 2018 and began his professional work at Star of Hope, an organization that provides services to adults and children with developmental disabilities. Receiving the Lilah Bidwell Human Dignity Award is special to Danny not only because it continues the recognition of Lilah’s legacy, but also because of her connection to Star of Hope. Lilah worked for many years in special education with the Coos Bay School District and served on the Board of Directors for Star of Hope in its early and formative years.

In addition to his professional work, Danny currently serves as an appointed member of the Citizen Review Board for Coos County, a role with an influence over the lives of the nearly 300 children in foster care in our communities. Additionally, he is on the Board of Directors for the Bob Belloni Ranch, an organization who also serves youth and provides mental health services through its counseling center. Danny also serves in a new role on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee for the Coos Bay School District. In receiving this honor, Danny hopes to shine a light on these causes he cares so much about.

The History of the Lilah Bidwell Human Dignity Award

Lilah Bidwell was an early recipient of the Human Dignity Award from the Human Rights Advocates of Coos County. In time the award was renamed in her honor and continues to be awarded each year to a member of our community whose long track record of service follows her example. Lilah also served on the Board of Directors for Star of Hope in its early years. Doug Veysey, a current Board Member for Star of Hope has also been awarded this honor and distinction.



Linda Todd, left, and Jolene Lanway reflect on growing up with their mother, Lilah Bidwell, during an interview in Coos Bay on Thursday. - World Photo by Alex Powers

“Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge, to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation.” — Martin Luther King Jr. Memphis, Tenn. April 3, 1968.

Lilah Bidwell was, in a word, a doer.

Among other things, she was an environmental advocate, founding member of the Friends of the Coos Bay Library, a member of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays and on the Coos County League of Women Voters. She spearheaded the preservation of the Egyptian Theatre and sat on the board of SHAMA House.

But between the meetings and the committees, the engagements and the appointments, she remained a great friend and a wonderful mother to her daughters, Jolene Lanway and Linda Todd.

“She was just my mom, but we just shared her with everybody,” Lanway said.

Bidwell died at age 76 on April 7, but her spirit continues to be honored by the community. She’s the recipient of the fourth-annual Human Dignity Award from the Human Rights Advocates of Coos County in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.

No tears flowed as Lanway, 55, and Todd, 58, sat in the waiting room last week at Bay Chiropractic Center in downtown Coos Bay. Lanway’s husband practices at the center and Todd works there as a receptionist. Against the backdrop of a rare, sunny, clear, but cold, winter afternoon in the city, the two women talked about life with and without their mom. They shared memories, smiled and laughed.

They talked about growing up with a single mother who worked part time while going to school and raising four kids.

After graduating from Eugene High School, Bidwell married Veryl Odel Bidwell in 1948. After the two divorced, Bidwell went back to school, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in education from the University of Oregon in 1965. She taught fifth grade in Eugene and got her master’s degree in special education in 1967. And between the jobs, the degrees and the kids, she found the time to give and volunteer. After her girls started leaving home, she turned to adoption.

“She was one of those people that was always there for anybody, anywhere,” Todd said, smiling and looking at her sister.

The days in Eugene weren’t exactly perfect for the kids though. At the time, Lanway said, it seemed her mother had some trouble juggling a home life and helping others.

“I know now (that) we came first, but at the time I didn’t think so,” she said.

And while it seemed like she always got a lot done, more often than not, she’d convince people to help her do the work, Todd said.

“She would convince you it was your idea to do it,” she said.

Lanway remembers a time when her mother asked her to help her with a household chore.

“She’d said, ‘Bring me the broom,’” Lanway said. “And when I brought it over, she (pointed and) told me to ‘go start over there.’”

The family moved to Coos Bay in 1967 and Bidwell continued teaching. Once here, she delved into local groups and volunteered wherever she felt she could make a difference, Lanway said.

She touched the lives of hundreds of people, Todd said. After her death, people from all over the community showed up to her service to pay their respects.

"I expected lots of people to show up, but there were people there I didn't even know she knew," she said.

And now, about nine months after her passing, Bidwell continues to serve, maybe not physically, but in spirit.

"I look at all the things she did and I feel I should do more," Todd said.

The annual Human Dignity Award is given to individuals who go out of their way to help mankind, said Carl Siminow, a board member of the Human Rights Advocates of Coos County.

And Bidwell fit the description to a T and was a logical choice for the award, Siminow said.

"She was very outgoing, very loving and a very hard worker," he said.

Her daughters now understand that their mom was a lot of different things to a lot of different people. But in the end, she remains their mother and their inspiration.

"She absolutely believed that one person could make a difference," Lanway said.

Lanway and Todd will accept the award on behalf of their mother tonight at the Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in downtown Coos Bay. The event begins at 5:30 p.m. at the Egyptian Theatre and will include African drummers, a number of speakers, short films and the presentation of Bidwell's award. A candlelight vigil will take place at the Coos Bay boardwalk at 7:30 p.m. All events are free.