



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John W. Mannion

Hundreds volunteer at MLK Jr. Day of Service at Nottingham H.S.

SENATOR JOHN W. MANNION January 16, 2024

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Over 250 volunteers gathered Monday morning for the 22nd annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. Throughout the four-hour-long event, volunteers packed Nottingham High School's gymnasium to collect gently used clothing and food donations.

Hosted by the United Way of Central New York and the Greater Syracuse Labor Council, donations included coats, gloves, hats, blankets, socks and nonperishable food for adults and children in central New York. Several volunteers said they attended the event to honor Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy.

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"We have Martin Luther King (Jr.) Day off, and it's really just not a day off, it's a day of service," said Helen Hudson, United Way's AFL-CIO labor liaison. "We do a day of service to be able to help people, folks in our community ... that need a hand up, not a hand out."

Hudson, who also serves as the Syracuse Common Council's president, said she credits the event's growth over the last two decades to the young people involved. Many children participated in this year's event, including Fired Up For Youth, Inc. — a group dedicated to providing educational and experiential opportunities to Onondaga County youth ages 13 to 19.

In the gym, volunteers wore shirts representing their various Syracuse-based organizations, from city Greek life to Micron Technology, at their respective tables. After members packed each box, volunteers labeled them with the name of the local nonprofit or community-based organization the items were going to, such as InterFaith Works of Central New York and the YWCA of Syracuse & Onondaga County.

Jessica Bowles, a patient service representative at SUNY Upstate Medical University, said that although it was her first year participating in the Day of Service event, she has volunteered at other events held by the United Way and the Greater Syracuse Labor Council.

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“I used to be that kid on the receiving end of donations and now I’ll be the one helping out,”
Bowles said.

Meisha Baker, an obstetrics and gynecology chief resident at SUNY Upstate Medical University, said she and other Upstate volunteers participated in the event to continue MLK Jr.’s legacy and give back to the community.

Karyne Brown and Minetsa Cotto Ortiz, two Syracuse University students and members of Alpha Kappa Alpha — the **first** historically Black sorority in the nation — said they volunteered to help represent their sorority’s mission of advocating for social justice and uplifting local communities. Brown and Yalis said they also celebrate their sorority’s “Founders’ Day” on MLK Jr. Day.

New York state Sen. John Mannion said the event acts as a great opportunity to “remember the words and actions” of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Mannion said he believes similar community service should happen every day.

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“It’s great to see such a big crowd and people giving themselves up today,” Mannion said. “I know a lot of people in the room and they really do a lot to just make central New York a better place.”

Syracuse residents had the opportunity to donate clothing and food items on Monday from 8 to 12 p.m. through “drive-up and drop off” donations at Nottingham High School’s gymnasium. Early drop-off was also available on Friday from 3 to 5 p.m.

Through Micron’s sponsorship of the event, Hudson said organizers were able to work with Macy’s to purchase coats with a “flash sale.” She also said ED23Hoops, a non-profit youth development organization founded by former SU basketball player Eric Michael Devendorf, donated hats, gloves and other clothing items, Hudson said.

Hudson expressed her gratitude for the volunteers and organizations who participated in Monday’s event and supported MLK Jr.’s legacy.

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“I just want to say thank you to this community for coming out, turning out and showing out,” Hudson said. “They really did show out.”

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