

Message from Eddie Rye, Jr., Chair Emeritus and Co-Founder of the Seattle/King County MLK Celebration Committee

Hello All Seattle/King County MLK Members, Volunteers, Supporters,

As a Co Founder of the Seattle/King County MLK Celebration Committee I find it imperative that I share the history of the committee which came about as a result of a January 15, 1983 nationwide demonstration demanding that the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday become a National Holiday, and in Seattle we were supporting the call for a MLK Holiday and protesting the City of Seattle's refusal to put up MLK signs on Empire Way after the city approved of the name change. A lawsuit filed by merchants on the South of Rainier (the businesses are listed on Nancy San Carlos' call for a boycott) held up placing the signs for over a year until the Washington State Supreme Court ruled on November 30, 1983 that the City of Seattle had the authority to change the name to honor Dr. King. The efforts of Nancy San Carlos is attached, yes, a white woman called for and organized a boycott and formed the "Coalition for Respect" (which I had the honor of co-chairing with her) to visibly confront the merchants that filed the lawsuit responsible for holding up the MLK name change. Seattle MLK Co- Founder Bob Barnes was assaulted on the picket line protesting racism and insensitivity, the documentation to the King County Prosecutor and the Seattle Police report is attached. Documentation of opposition is also attached.

A pic of the late Seattle City Councilman George Benson is attached, he was Chair, Seattle City Council Transportation Committee and was an ardent supporter of the name change to MLK Way. His staffer for the committee was Mr. Bob Morgan who let me know early that a lot of the opposition to the name change was because Empire Way was State Highway 900 and the MLK Way sign would be on the I-5 Freeway. Norm Rice and the late Sam Smith were very supportive, which means that the majority of the whites on Seattle City Council supported the name change in spite of the recommendations from the Board of Public Works. Mayor Charles Royer signed MLK Way into law August, 1982.

The name of the King County was symbolically changed to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. County by proclamation in 1984 by King County Council Members Ron Sims an Republican Bruce Lang. At the 1999 Seattle MLK event a motion was passed an approved by 2500 Rally attendees to change the name of the county to honor MLK since 14 years later there was nothing to indicate that this was Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. County. King County Councilman Larry Gossett was charged with executing the legislative strategy to officially change the name. It turns out only the state legislature has the authority to change the name of a county, so State Senator Adam Kline introduced legislation eight times before it finally passed in 2005 there were fewer than ten members of color in the legislature in 2005 so there was significant support from white legislators. It took two additional years to get the MLK logo.

I am encouraging all MLK Committee Members to read, listen too, and reflect on the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy and legacy on non-violent social change and he states over and over the importance of LOVE. The Seattle/King County MLK Committee must adhere to Dr. King's teachings. The committee has always been multi-racial and there is no room for hate.

Continued next page, links to Historical Documents

Historical Documents forwarded by Eddie Rye Jr.

Seattle Times article about the struggle to change the name and street signs on the road that is now Martin Luther King Jr. Way S

<http://mlkseattle.org/files/SeattleTimes1982MLKStreetNameArticle.pdf>

Transcript of Eddie Rye, Jr.'s response to an editorial against changing the street signs: why this is important to do, July 1982.

<http://mlkseattle.org/files/EddieRyeResponsetoKOMOTVEditorial.pdf>

Laborers International Union 541 letter about boycotting businesses which are trying to block the name change to MLK Way

<http://mlkseattle.org/files/NancyCall4Boycott.pdf> note that one of the signers is Bob Barnes who is still active on the MLK Celebration Committee

Intoxicated racists attacked peaceful picketers including Bob Barnes who are out to support the name change to MLK Way.

<http://mlkseattle.org/files/BobBarnesAttacked.pdf>

Photo of City Council member George Benson, " an ardent supporter of the name change to MLK Way."

<http://mlkseattle.org/files/SeattleCityCouncilmanGeorgeBenson.pdf>

[back to MLK Celebration Committee homepage](#)