

Students hope MLK video will lead to acceptance

by Mary Elizabeth Geraci
Jackson Hole Guide

Martin Luther King Jr. perhaps never imagined that his life and death would be memorialized by Americans. But the impact he made on American race relations was so powerful that his message, which remains prevalent decades after his death, has to this day not become dated.

King's presence still can be felt in nearly every corner of the country — even in Jackson, where many people may not even know that Monday was a holiday in the civil-rights leader's honor.

At the request of Chamber of Commerce Director Steve Duerr, Western Wyoming High School commemorates Martin Luther King Day by doing something special at the school every year.

For the past few years, high school students have either performed skits about King at the Mainstage Theater or recorded radio spots. Things at the school were hectic this year, but even so, two students are doing something different.

Senior Amy Guear and sophomore Hillary Porter made a video dedicated to King in which they recited King's "I Have a Dream" speech and aired it on the local news Monday morning. Later that day they presented the speech on the Town Square.

Western Wyoming High School Principal Terry Roice said he is happy to celebrate MLK Day with the students because it gives a valuable reminder of the importance of peace and equality in the world.

The holiday "is a good reminder to all of us about some of our fundamental democratic values, about promoting equality of opportunity," Roice said.

Although people in today's society,

including in Jackson, are more accepting of others' differences than they used to be, racism and prejudice will always be universal problems, he said, stating, "It's part of our human failures sometimes to be too self-centered."

More than anything, in teaching about King, Roice hopes students will walk away with the firm credence that one person "can have a tremendous influence and really can make a difference — that progress can be made."

Guear was inspired by that very belief when she decided to participate in the project.

King's "I Have a Dream" speech "makes a pretty big impression and it's pretty sentimental, just everything he talks about," she said. "It was just kind of interesting to me, and it has always been a remembrance holiday."

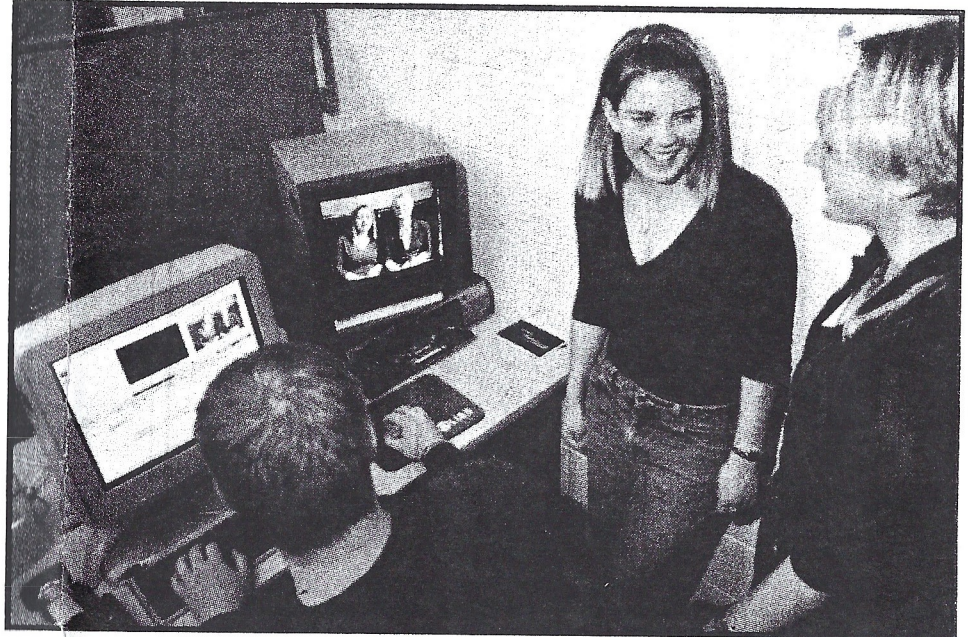
When Porter heard about what Guear was doing, she was eager to help because she believes King is an important historical figure.

Even after hearing others' opinions that conflict with her own views, Porter said, "I've always looked up to him."

If not for the things she learned about King in school over the years and the documentaries she has watched, she might have become racist like others, she said. Without persistent lessons about King, her appreciation for the civil rights leader might have fallen by the wayside.

"You learn it when you're young and you kind of forget when you get older," she said. The films she has watched about King and the constant reiteration of his profound accomplishments led her down the path of acceptance.

These days, racism really bothers her. Porter hopes that upon seeing the video, "other people will know and change their thinking."



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Western Wyoming High School students (from right) Hillary Porter, 16, Amy Guear, 18, and Andrew Sheridan, 17, edit a video presentation that the girls created about Martin Luther King Jr. to celebrate and recognize the holiday.

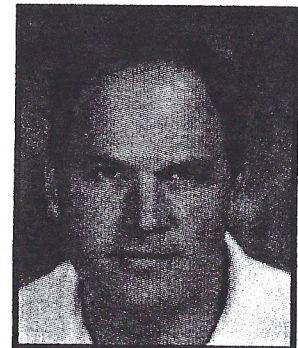
Chamber director acknowledges MLK Day

By Mary Elizabeth Geraci
Jackson Hole Guide

Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday has passed again, but in Jackson Hole you might not know it unless you're a government employee who gets the day off. No one marches through the streets carrying signs depicting the face of a man who changed the world through his impassioned work for racial equality.

Perhaps it is because Jackson's black population is so small. Whatever the reason, to many Jackson residents Martin Luther

King Day is just like any other day. For Chamber of Commerce Director Steve Duerr, however, the day carries with it a powerful meaning.



Steve Duerr

"He was an angel among us. He was always standing up for human rights and civil rights on the pattern of Gandhi."

— *Steve Duerr,
Chamber of Commerce
Director*

"He was an angel among us," Duerr said. "He was always standing up for human rights and civil rights on the pattern of Gandhi.... He accomplished great things by the type of man he was and the speaking skills he had and the dreams he had."

Inspired by King's bold leadership in the fight against prejudice and his reception of the Nobel Peace Prize at age 35, Duerr believes King "merits our remembrance, especially in this blessed mountain enclave so far removed from the pressing urgent needs of urban poor."

Because Jackson is a place where few racial tensions develop, the civil rights leader receives too little attention here, said Duerr.

Disturbed by that apathy, he developed a program at Western Wyoming High School dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr. This is the program's third year, and it helps ensure that the high school will do some sort of program each year commemorating Dr. King and the legacy he left behind.

After all, said Duerr, "The example of his life and the types of things he wrote and spoke about were universal."