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Honoring Lloyd Powell, and the Constitution Washtenaw's public defender receives "I Have A Dream" award

BY MARY MORGAN

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Lloyd Powell, Washtenaw County public defender, speaks after receiving the "I Have a Dream" award from the Washtenaw County Bar Association.

When Washtenaw County Prosecutor Brian Mackie introduced Lloyd Powell on Thursday night, he used phrases like “foot soldier of the Constitution” and “joyous crusader for justice.” Those descriptions are meaningful not just for Powell, but for the thousands of people who’ve relied on the Washtenaw County Public Defender’s office over the nearly 30 years that Powell has led that group.

Powell was honored this week with the “I Have a Dream” award. It was given by the Washtenaw County Bar Association at its annual Bias Awareness Week dinner, attended by nearly 100

lawyers, judges and other elected officials in the legal community. The award recognizes an individual or institution that fosters greater awareness and sensitivity to racial, ethnic and gender bias issues.

Powell described the work of his office as “fighting like gladiators to ferret out the truth.” Referring to Martin Luther King Jr. as his contemporary and a hero, he noted that King often talked about justice, including in one of his most famous speeches for which the WCBA award is named. “Justice,” Powell said, “is what he was about, and that’s what we are about.”

To achieve justice, Powell said, the criminal justice system requires that all parties – police, prosecutors, defenders, the courts and corrections – work together and collaborate whenever they can. “We are all interrelated,” he said.

An example of collaboration that Powell has spearheaded is an annual public forum called the Enhancement of Police and Community Trust, or ENPACT. The event, which was held this year on Oct. 22, brings together the county’s law enforcement officials with local community groups, including the local branches of the NAACP, the Black Employees Association of Washtenaw County Government, the Huron Valley Association of Black Social Workers and others.

Powell also recognized and praised his staff during his remarks, saying that they believed their profession was a calling, not just a livelihood. He received a standing ovation from the audience.

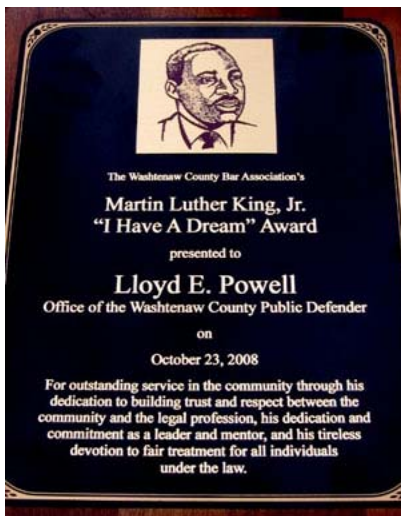
Kym Worthy was the evening's keynote speaker, and echoed many of the themes that Powell discussed. The Wayne County prosecuting attorney has been in the national spotlight for taking on former Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. The case was fundamentally about protecting the tenets of the criminal justice system, Worthy said, for which Kilpatrick had "true disregard."

Speaking to the theme of the bias awareness week, Worthy said her office struggles with immigration issues, especially in an area as diverse as metro Detroit. Immigrants who are convicted of even minor crimes can face deportation by the INS, often being returned to harsh living conditions. "We really struggle as a prosecutor's office to do the right thing," she said.

Worthy is also concerned about the "huge problem" between the African-American and Arab-American communities in Wayne County, saying that the two communities don't understand each other and that can lead to any number of crimes. "If we could crack that," she said, "it would be a lot easier to do my job."



From left: Kim Moore (co-chair of the Bias Awareness Committee), Lloyd Powell, Kym Worthy and Brian Mackie.



The "I Have A Dream" award presented to Lloyd Powell.



Lorne Brown, Washtenaw County first assistant public defender, talks with Wayne County Prosecuting Attorney Kym Worthy, who was keynote speaker at the Oct. 23 Bias Awareness Week awards dinner, held at Weber's Inn.