

## Two community members receive first annual MLK Jr. Spirit Award

Two members of the University City community are the first to receive the School District of University City Board of Education's Martin Luther King Jr. Spirit Award. Chris Hexter and Rev. Ronald H. Vail Sr. were honored during the District's 17th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on January 19 at University City High School. Hexter and Vail were selected from among 12 nominees. Both work or have worked toward racial unity and justice.

Hexter has been active in civil rights activities since he participated in a demonstration at "Bughouse Square" in front of the Scottish National Museum in Edinburgh, Scotland on behalf of the African National Congress in April 1960 on a weekend following the slaughter of innocent people in front of the Sharpville, South African police station. He followed that with active involvement in St. Louis' Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality both before and after the Jefferson Bank Protest taking place two days after the August 28, 1963, March on Washington. Through his involvement in St. Louis CORE, he was privileged to meet and work with Percy Green, former Congressman William Clay, Marion and Charles Oldham and Norman Seay to name a few of CORE's more prominent leaders. He then served as a freedom school teacher in Ruleville and Indianola, Mississippi. Indianola was where the White Citizens Council was formed after the May 1954 Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education was decided. He served as a teacher during the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964. He led a contingent of four bus loads of University of Wisconsin students in sit-in demonstrations in front of the White House in March 1965 for the Voting Rights Act during the Selma-Montgomery March. He was an active supporter of the creation of an African-American studies program at the University of Wisconsin in 1968 and 1969.

Having graduated from University City High School in 1963, Hexter returned to University City in 1972, where he actively participated in several programs in support of the public schools, including organizing a 1989 Careers Day Program for UCHS students. Since 1991, Chris has been an active organizer of and participant in a joint venture between his congregation, Central Reform Congregation and Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church. He has been a partner with the St. Louis law firm of Schuchat, Cook & Werner where he has practiced labor employment law since September 1976.

Rev. Vail served under the leadership and guidance of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for several years, beginning in 1961 with the Freedom Riders, the Mississippi Voting Rights Movement, the Birmingham Movement and the Selma Voting Rights Movement. He is the former president of the Metropolitan St. Louis Chapter of Operation PUSH. Rev. Vail has traveled throughout the world speaking for nonviolence. He has led seminars, workshops and conferences in Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, D.C.; New York, Alabama, Tennessee, Chicago, Illinois and Florida for the World Baptist Convention, Race Relations, World Council of Churches and others. He is the vice president of the Association of Non-Violent Social Change of America, which is the Missouri support group for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia.

In February 1991, Rev. Vail was inducted into the prestigious Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He was commissioned by the United Nations in 1992 to conduct Non-Violence Workshops in Frankfurt, Germany. Rev. Vail serves as Pastor of the Bible Way Baptist Church of University City.