

Biggers, Caldwell to Receive 2015 Gaston County MLK Unity Award

Written by Kristen Clanton

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Biggers and Caldwell to be Honored with the 2015 Gaston County MLK Unity Award

The Gaston Clergy & Citizens Coalition (GC3), an initiative of Gaston Together, will present the 2015 Gaston County MLK Unity Awards to James Converse Biggers, Jr. and Judge Jesse B. Caldwell III on Monday, January 19th at 10:30 am at the MLK Plaza. The Plaza is located on the corner of Marietta St. and Long Ave. in downtown Gastonia.

The Gaston County MLK Unity Award was established in 2004 by the GC3. The award recognizes current or former Gaston County citizens who have performed exemplary community service to help build bridges of unity across lines of race, class, gender, faith and/or municipalities within our county. Names of the honorees are engraved on the MLK Monument located at the Plaza. Some of the past winners include: Senator Marshall Rauch, the late N. A. Smith, Rev. Houston Matthews, the late Mrs. Peggie Ferguson and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Penegar.

Familiar to many as a native of Gaston County, James Biggers is a respected educator and visual artist. His art work reflects his African heritage and includes such works as the mural North Carolina Belongs to Children, in the North Carolina Legislative Building; the mural Celebrations, in the Charlotte Convention Center, and featured works in museums and art centers throughout the country. In 1977, he received a Fulbright-Hayes Grant to tour Japan as part of the North Carolina Art Teachers' Japan Seminar at Duke University. He has worked closely with the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC) on several projects.

Mr. Biggers has held teaching positions in public schools, colleges and a museum within the state of North Carolina. Now retired, Mr. Biggers taught in the Gaston County Schools for 30 years. He currently serves as an adjunct professor at Gaston College. Through his years as an educator and his thematic artwork, he has quietly sought to develop a better understanding of different cultures for the betterment of all citizens.

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Jesse Caldwell also grew up in Gaston County, graduated from Hunter Huss High School, UNC Chapel Hill and UNC Law School. He has practiced law for more than twenty years including service with the Public Defenders Office, and has been a North Carolina Superior Court Judge since 1993. He is a recent President of the North Carolina Conference of Superior Court Judges. Judge Caldwell is a lifelong member of First United Methodist Church in Gastonia where he has been active as a Sunday School teacher, a certified lay speaker and as a member of numerous and varied outreach and ministry programs.

Upon learning of this honor, Judge Caldwell said, "I am deeply humbled and honored to join James Biggers as one of the recipients of this distinguished recognition created in tribute to Dr. King, whose own dream was America's dream of treating everyone as equals, just like our Creator. My family, teachers, and public leaders inspired in me an appreciation that true equality best comes when we cultivate and celebrate our common humanity. All I have tried to do is imitate the many people of this community who every day build bridges of unity, both large and small, wherever God has placed them."

The presentation of the awards will be part of an annual event designed by the GC3 to recognize the dream of Dr. King for all races. It is a dream very much alive in Gaston County. Please join the celebration as we honor those in our midst who have worked to build bridges of unity in our county.

The GC3 is a county-wide, non-denominational ministerial association formed in the late 1990's by Gaston Together. The GC3 meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 9:00am at CaroMont Regional Hospital. For more information, please call Gaston Together (704-867-9869.)