



Gardere MLK Jr. Oratory Competition History

The Gardere MLK Jr. Oratory Competition was established in Dallas in 1993 by the law firm of Gardere & Wynne to commemorate the life of Dr. King. Presented in the spirit of learning and celebration, the program was designed to highlight the cultural diversity of the community while recognizing and encouraging the writing and speaking skills of elementary school students.

The initial venue for the Dallas event was one of the law firm's conference rooms and later Dallas' First Baptist Church. Substantial growth spurred the firm to move the competition to its current location, The Majestic Theatre in downtown Dallas.

In 1995, Dallas' Gardere & Wynne merged with Houston's Sewell & Riggs, creating the law firm now known as Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP. With offices in Austin, Dallas, Houston and Mexico City, it is one of the Southwest's largest full-service law firms.

The Dallas MLK Jr. Oratory Competition was embraced by the new Houston office, with the attorneys establishing a similar program. The inaugural Houston event was held in 1997 at the historic Antioch Missionary Baptist Church of Christ in downtown Houston, which continues to play host to the competition annually.

Incorporating ideals from Dr. King's writings and speeches, students write and present speeches of three to five minutes in length. The students' presentations focus on how Dr. King's words have inspired them personally and how his words can motivate the community as a whole.

The theme for the 2010 competition is ***"What will I be able to achieve in my life because of what Dr. King achieved in his?"*** Previous themes have included:

- *"If Dr. King Were Alive Today, What Do You Think He Would Say About Current Events?"*
- *"Remember! Celebrate! Act!"*
- *"How is the Dream of Martin Luther King Jr. Meaningful in Today's World?"*
- *"Reflecting the Past, Visualizing the Future"*

Participants are fourth- and fifth-grade students from the Dallas and Houston Independent School Districts who have won the qualifying competitions. In-school competitions are held at each of the participating schools with the first place winners advancing to the semi-final competition, where finalists are selected to take part in the final competition on the Friday preceding the national Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday, which will be January 15 in 2010.

In 2009, more than 250 students representing 26 schools participated in the Gardere MLK Jr. Oratory Competitions. In 2010, we estimate approximately 300 students from 40 schools will participate in the competition.

Click on the following link, <http://tinyurl.com/yk7lpxa>, for more program details, including video links to the 2009 speeches and a compilation video of the 2008 competition.