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Corine G. Sims (far right), presented a plaque to Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White (center) when he spoke at the Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship Dinner. At left is Sims' daughter, Barbara Malone; at right is her husband, the Rev. James Sims, Sr.

Festival Organizer Corine G. Sims Dies

August 6, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Corine Garrett Sims, founder of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival, co-sponsored by Illinois Wesleyan University, died Friday, Aug. 3, 2007, at the age of 78.

Visitation will be from 5 to 8 p.m. Friday, Aug. 10 at Kibler-Smith Memorial Home, Bloomington. Memorial service will be at 10 a.m. Saturday, August 11 at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Bloomington. The Rev. Frank McSwain will officiate. Interment will be in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, Bloomington. Memorials may be made to the family.

"I was saddened to learn of the passing of our friend, Corine Sims," said Illinois Wesleyan University President Richard F. Wilson. "Her enthusiasm and drive made the MLK Gospel Festival possible and helped to keep the legacy of Dr. King alive on the Illinois Wesleyan campus and in the Bloomington-Normal community. We will miss her enduring dedication and commitment."

Sims was known for her dynamic personality and tireless efforts to improve her local community. She organized the Gospel Festival in 1991, saying she saw a need to honor King on a spiritual level. As executive director of the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, she envisioned a day of gospel music. Sims approached former Illinois Wesleyan University President Minor Myers Jr. to request Illinois Wesleyan as a venue for the event. The University is a fitting site for the Festival: King spoke at the campus twice, in 1961 and in 1966.

Now in its 18th year, the Gospel Festival that Sims created is celebrated each year around King's birthday. The Festival honors King with hours of gospel music from choirs from Chicago to Springfield, Ill.



Corine G. Sims addressed the audience at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival.

Sims' activism continued beyond the festival. Shortly after the festival began, Sims helped to organize the Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship Dinner. Held in conjunction with the Festival, the

dinner has hosted legendary speakers, including King's children, Martin III, Bernice, and Yolanda; civil rights leaders Dorothy Cotton and the Rev. Joseph Lowery; famed journalist Roger Wilkins; and Secretary of State Jesse White.

Mrs. Sims is survived by her husband, the Rev. James E. Sims, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Streator; daughter, Barbara (Anton) Sims-Malone, Bloomington; three sons, Charles L. (Nancy) Sims, Peoria; Jarry D. (Esther) Sims, Decatur; and Jimmy L. Sims, Peoria; two adopted sons, Marcus Terhune, Champaign, and Darryll Terhune, Bloomington; 30 grandchildren; and 26 great-grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by one son, James Edward Sims Jr.; one adopted son, Donald (Tony) Terhune; one grandson, Anthony DeLance Malone; and 11 brothers and sisters.

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