

Noted civil rights activist to speak at MCCC

WEST WINDSOR — As one of the last people to speak to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., before his assassination, civil rights activist Jesse Epps, of Willingboro, will offer his perspective of a turbulent time in American history in his talk, "Civil Rights Then and Now: Where Do We Go From Here?" at noon Feb. 10 at Mercer County Community College.

Free and open to the public, Mr. Epps' talk is part of Mercer's Distinguished Lecture Series and will take place in the communications building, CM 109, on the West Windsor campus, 1200 Old Trenton Road.

Educated in labor relations at Syracuse, Rutgers and Cornell universities, Mr. Epps has spent the last 40 years fighting for and defending the rights and conditions of working men and women. He began his professional labor experience with the International Union of Electrical Workers at Local 320 in Syracuse, N.Y., as chief steward and executive board member on the Educational and Civil Rights committees.

From 1960 to 1972, he

served as the assistant to the International President of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. Working on behalf of AFSCME, he traveled to Memphis in the spring of 1968 to assist in settling the sanitation workers' strike against the city. In the waning days of this effort, Dr. King agreed to the request of AFSCME officials to become involved in the struggle. The strike ended with the tragic assassination of Dr. King on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel on April 4, 1968. In spite of this tragedy, or perhaps as a result of it, Mr. Epps and AFSCME successfully negotiated a contract for the 1,300 workers. Last April, Mr. Epps was recognized for his role in the strike with the Drum Major for Justice Award, presented by the women's branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Also during the 1960s, Mr. Epps served as an advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House staff with regard to the participation of young people, students and minorities in the Democratic Party and the

government. A lifetime member of the NAACP, Mr. Epps has assisted in the organization of the American Civil Liberties Union of Central New York and is involved with the AFL-CIO, and other local, national and international labor entities.

In recent years, Mr. Epps has focused his energies on establishing the National Union of American Families, a coalition of interdependent neighborhood unions of families working together at the community, state, and national levels to help improve the quality of life for Americans both inside and outside the workplace.

"We are very excited that this distinguished leader will speak to our campus community," said Eric Watson, a professor of history and English at MCCC. "He was a foot soldier in the civil rights movement and made a great contribution in the fight for justice and equality."

To learn more about upcoming lectures at Mercer County Community College, visit www.mccc.edu/news_events or call 570-3324.

