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By [RNW Correspondent Davaughn Clayton](#) • on January 18, 2010

For twenty-four years now, Romans have celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day with a parade.

This year's theme was "Unity in the Community."

The parade began on South Broad Street and ended at the Rome City Auditorium with a plethora of speakers.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Clarice Ford, former Berry College professor and current Associate Dean of Student Services and Executive Director at the University of Illinois Springfield Diversity Center.

Jo Ann Thompson said that she attends the MLK festivities every year and feels that it is a, "big and important event in the black community."

She said that it also helps to keep the "racial communication lines open."

Monday's parade included between 1000 to 1500 people marching down the streets while singing and chanting.

People held signs with various slogans including, "Knowledge is power," "Stay in school," and "Youth are our future."

Instead of Broad Street being blocked off, the procession had motorcycle police riding ahead of them and keeping traffic under control.

Pastor Bobby Brazil was on the megaphone leading Monday's march with songs.

He said he had been doing this for at least four years.

Brazil said the crowds are usually between 1500 and 2000 but were down a bit this year.

April Thomas, a first year attendee and Paulding county resident, brought her children along for the celebration. Her children also helped out in the parade.

Thomas said they learned about the celebration when they helped a local group, 100 Black Men of Rome, clear out and clean up a historical black cemetery.

Following the presentation at the Rome City Auditorium, a lunch social was held at the Rome Civic Center.