

Soup Kitchen earns LMC Diversity Award

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College presented its annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Award to the Soup Kitchen of Benton Harbor on Monday at the Mendel Center, as part of its Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration.

This is the 13th year LMC has handed out the award, and the 19th year of its Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration. Monday was Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The Diversity Award is presented by the LMC president and board of trustees to an “individual or organization that embraces and values the diversity of the greater commu-



Photo provided

Debbie Gillespie (middle), president of the Soup Kitchen Board of Trustees, accepts the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Award on behalf of the Soup Kitchen, from LMC Board of Trustees Chairman Dr. David Maysick (left) as KC Gast, vice president of the Soup Kitchen board, looks on.

nity and promotes LMC press release. connections across differ- Criteria include: a dem- onstrated commitment to

enhancing inclusion through community service and professional endeavors; contributions to the progress of humanity, diversity, and the valuing of differences; and leadership in providing increased understanding and respect for diversity.

The Soup Kitchen has been in operation for 33 years. In its early years, it was operated entirely by the St. Joseph Catholic Church, and was open three days a week, the release said. Later the Soup Kitchen rented a small space on Pipestone, not far from Main Street, and began using volunteer groups from area churches to provide daily meals. The need

outgrew the space, and in 1997 the Soup Kitchen moved from its location on Pipestone to its current location, the former YMCA building (now owned by the Salvation Army). A fundraising effort of approximately \$250,000 made the current space possible.

The Soup Kitchen, which serves more than 55,000 meals a year, is staffed 365 days a year, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., by approximately 40 churches and professional organizations that donate 7,500 volunteer hours each year. The Soup Kitchen's administrative staff includes Executive Director Merry Stover and four part-time employees from the community.