

RENAMING CELEBRATION AND CEREMONY FOR
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CIVIC CENTER

PROGRAM

RENAMING CELEBRATION AND CEREMONY FOR SAVANNAH'S DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CIVIC CENTER

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026 | 3 P.M.

Musical Prelude

Welcome - *Midori Carpenter, City of Savannah*

Opening Prayer - *Pastor Lydia Rayner-Syed,
Grace & Deliverance Kingdom Church of Christ*

Presentation of Colors - *Savannah Fire Department & Savannah Police Department*

Star Spangled Banner

Lift Every Voice and Sing

Recognitions - *Midori Carpenter, City of Savannah*

Greetings

*Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, City of Savannah, GA
Judge LeRoy Burke, III, President, Savannah MLK Observance Day Association
Bishop Thomas J. Sills, Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance*

Musical Selection - *MLK Dedication Choir*

Community Message - *Joseph A. Melder, City of Savannah City Manager*

Savannah Civic Center History - *Luciana Spracher, City of Savannah Archives &
History Officer*

Musical Selection - *MLK Dedication Choir*

DEDICATION CEREMONY

Dedicatory Prayers

*Imam Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, Masjid Jihad, Inc.
Bishop Stephen D. Parkes, Diocese of Savannah
Rabbi Robert Haas, Congregation Mickve Israel*

Unveiling of Ceremonial Plaque - *Mayor Van R. Johnson, II*

Ceremony Host - *Pastor Thurmond N. Tillman, First African Baptist Church*

Musical Selection - *MLK Dedication Choir*

Recognition of the Founders of the MLK Observance Day Association
Bishop Thomas J. Sills, Connor's Temple Baptist Church

Introduction of Messenger - *Pastor Charles P. Roberson, Kingdom Life Christian
Fellowship*

Musical Selection - *MLK Dedication Choir*

Dedication Message - *Dr. Da'Henri R. Thurmond, Sr., St. Paul CME Church*

Closing Hymn - *We Shall Overcome*

Savannah's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Civic Center *A Brief History*

A new Civic Center was first proposed in 1960 to replace the City's aging Municipal Auditorium on Orleans Square. In 1967, the City Council approved the construction of a new Civic Center and hired architects Ben Ritzert and Vernon Nowell to design a combined arena and theatre complex. Using federal Urban Renewal funds and a general obligation bond issue, the \$7.9 million construction project exemplified the New Formalist architectural style popular with high-profile cultural and municipal buildings of the era.



The Savannah Symphony hosted the Civic Center's first event in December 1971, before construction was finished. The official grand opening was a week-long affair in February 1972, highlighted by a gala featuring songwriter, lyricist, and Savannah native Johnny Mercer.

In 1978, the theatre was named in honor of Johnny Mercer. At the request of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the City Council named the arena in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in July 1984.



In 1996, a \$5.5 million renovation and expansion included the addition of 9,000 square feet of second-floor community meeting rooms, extending beyond the exterior walls under the portico. All the rooms were named in honor of African Americans and women who made significant contributions to Savannah's history across a wide range of time periods and issues, including Mary Musgrove, Andrew Bryan, Jane Deveaux, James Simms, Flannery O'Connor, and Franklin Traub.



On June 27, 2024, following the opening of Savannah's EnMarket Arena, the City Council approved the demolition of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Arena and the renovation of the Johnny Mercer Theatre, ballroom, and community meeting rooms, while retaining the name and legacy of Dr. King. On December 11, 2025, the Mayor and Aldermen approved a resolution renaming the Savannah Civic Center as Savannah's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Civic Center.

Aldermen approved a resolution renaming the Savannah Civic Center as Savannah's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Civic Center.