

NAACP speaker issues challenge

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The official theme of Sunday's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Freedom Fund banquet was "One Nation, One Dream," but the underlying message after featured speaker Tene Wells took the podium was, "We can do better."

The 28th Freedom Fund banquet was a chance for average joes, up-and-comers and established personalities to mix, mingle and celebrate the group's accomplishments.

"We've come a long way," St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis said during his mayoral proclamation early in the program. "This community has come a long way."

With celebration came a challenge, however.

The words of Wells — who's had stints as the president of the WomenVenture and the executive director of the Youth Coordinating Board for the city of Minneapolis — were regularly followed by a chorus of applause as she pleaded with the attentive group of a couple of hundred people at the Radisson Suite Hotel in St. Cloud.

The group of NAACP members gathered was diverse in age, race and gender, a simple detail that spoke volumes on the eve of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

But Wells asked more of the group.

She asked the group members to think about their lives and their purpose. She wondered aloud if the community was doing enough, if it had backed off after reaching the doorstep of King's dream.

"We in America, in 2011, 48 years after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, if we find ourselves living in fear and out of control it's because we choose to."

The crowd nodded as she spoke.

Those gathered were asked to evaluate themselves at every level and do more.

Once those goals are achieved, Wells challenged the group to do better.

It was a night of celebration, but it was also a night of realization.

"You need to be addressing these tough issues," she said. "Not just eating the food."



Tene Wells, former president of Women Venture in St. Paul, a nonprofit organization that helps women become economically successful, delivers her keynote speech Sunday night during the 28th Annual NAACP Freedom Fund dinner at the Radisson Suite Hotel. (Kimm Anderson, kanderson@stcloudtimes.com)

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