

## Urban Alliance founder honored

WYNNE PARRY The Advocate

Article Last Updated: 02/27/2008 12:57:38 AM EST

STAMFORD — The Israeli Consulate and the local Jewish community honored city resident and educator Eric Cooper in a tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. Tuesday night at Congregation Agudath Shalom.

In the 17-year history of the consulate's tribute, this is the first year it has been given in Connecticut.

Cooper, founder and president of National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, which seeks to improve education for disadvantaged minority students, was honored because of his commitment to education as a civil right.

"I think it's appropriate. Dr. King really stood for us taking on and embracing adaptive challenges — challenges that don't have textbook answers," said John Ramos, superintendent of Bridgeport schools, where the alliance is working with staff in struggling schools to help them better serve their students.

As part of the tribute, Cooper received a plaque and trees will be planted in his honor in an Israeli forest dedicated to King.

"I wish I could run into my guidance counselor from Peekskill, N.Y., who basically told my mother and my father that I would never amount to anything," Cooper said upon accepting the tribute. "Every single child should become the child that succeeds."

Cooper has visited Israel to learn techniques for better assessing and educating those labeled as low-performing.

Here, children of color are over-represented in special education classes, he said. Meanwhile, men of color make up most of the prison population, many of whom are diagnosed with learning disabilities.

"We have to find techniques and instruments that are dramatic enough to change the trajectories of the lives of the students," Cooper, who has two children attending Scofield Magnet Middle School, said in an interview before the ceremony. "No one knows the capacity of a child besides God,"

Harold Levine, chairman of the Music and Arts Center for Humanity in Bridgeport and a Westport resident, attended the ceremony because he said he supports the alliance's work.

"I find it very frustrating — I live 18 miles from Bridgeport. The kids in Westport get everything. The kids in Bridgeport get nothing," he said, adding that the ultimate problem is lack of funding.

"The only hope we have is that organizations like NUA will be able to reach into schools and help them, and perhaps by virtue of success, influence state legislators and federal legislators," he said.

David Saranga, the consulate's spokesman, said the tribute is intended to encourage the relationship between Israel and the African-American community. The Jewish Federation of Stamford, New Canaan and Darien and the Jewish National Fund collaborated with the consulate for the tribute, which is given in February because it is Black History Month.

# JEWISH LEDGER

AN INDEPENDENT WEEKLY NEWSPAPER SINCE 1929

981 B Farmington Ave.  
West Hartford, CT 06107  
860-231-7742

L • C • R

Interior Design, Furniture, Giftware *and everything for the dining table*

275 Post Road East  
Westport, CT 06880  
203-221-8131

••••• OPEN ON SUNDAYS 12-5, APRIL AND MAY •••••

## Archives

---

### Israel Consulate honors Stamford education pioneer

*Published: Wednesday, March 5, 2008 8:26 PM EST*

STAMFORD - The Consulate General of Israel and the Jewish National Fund joined with the United Jewish Federation of Greater Stamford, New Canaan, and Darien on Tuesday evening, Feb. 26 to honor Stamford resident Dr. Eric Cooper, founder and President of the National Urban Alliance (NUA), at the consulate's annual tribute to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Held at Congregation Agudath Shalom, the evening marked the first time in the 17-year history of the consulate tribute that it was held in Connecticut.

The Israeli Consulate honored Cooper for his work in improving the quality of education in inner-city schools by working with teachers and administrators to inspire disadvantaged students to succeed.

"Demography is not destiny," Dudley Williams, former president of the Stamford School District quoted Cooper as saying, noting that the honoree's work to help all children improve their chances for success made him especially fitting to receive an honor in tribute to Dr. King.

Though he was unable to attend the dinner, Stamford Mayor Daniel Malloy noted in a letter to guests that "Eric's life has been about the completion of Martin Luther King's ideas."

In presenting the award, which included trees planted in an Israeli forest dedicated to King, David Saranga, Consul for Media and Public Affairs at the Israeli Consulate in New York, described the contributions both King and Cooper have made to the State of Israel. "Israel is the only country outside of the United States to commemorate Martin Luther King Day annually" he said, adding that "Dr. King's values serve as cornerstones in our attempts to bring peace to the holy land."

Citing the NUA partnership with the Jerusalem-based International Center for the Enhancement of Learning Potential, Saranga said that, like King, Cooper has embraced the idea of Tikkun Olam, of fixing the world to make it a better place. In fact, he has traveled to Israel to learn techniques for improving assessment and education of students who are under performing.

During his acceptance speech, Cooper, who has two children at Scofield Magnet Middle School in Stamford, said every child has potential and, thus, "Every single child should become the child that succeeds."

He also noted the importance of working together diligently as a community to ensure children's future

"If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far - go together," he said, quoting an African proverb.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Diana Bourisaw, Superintendent of the Saint Louis schools, summed up the evening's atmosphere, saying, "The children have spiritual poverty. Give hope to the children" that will allow them to succeed.