

## Urban League kicks off 'Empowered' campaign, Morial keynotes St. Louis' 92nd annual dinner

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On Monday night the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis hosted its 92nd annual dinner and celebrated the national organization's centennial at the Millennium Hotel in Downtown St. Louis.

A sold-out dinner crowd came to hear Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis President and CEO James H. Buford deliver his annual report and National Urban League President and CEO Marc H. Morial offer the keynote speech.

Morial's theme was the Urban League's new "I Am Empowered" campaign.

"We have to embrace a new approach," Morial said.

Morial outlined four goals that everyone should strive to accomplish by 2025, hoping at least two million people would dedicate themselves to meeting the goals.

Every child should be ready for college and life, people should have access to a job and benefits, people should be living in safe, decent affordable housing, and everyone should have affordable healthcare.

A former mayor of New Orleans, Morial said the Urban League is celebrating its past 100 years by organizing the community to improve for the future.

"We must seize this movement to chart the future," Morial said.

Buford connected his annual report to the theme of the centennial.

"Empowering communities and changing lives is the message of the Metropolitan of St. Louis Urban League," Buford said.

"The Urban League served over 50,000 clients in the area of economic empowerment meeting basic needs, educational quality and equality, civil engagement and social justice. In 2009, Urban League received \$11.7 million in new grants to enhance 23 new programs."

As always, Morial praised Buford and the local affiliate, which is often recognized as the best in the national organization.

"In this city, we have special success when it comes to raising funds for the Urban League," Morial said.

"I say, 'Go down to the Lou and talk to Buford' when it comes to a new affiliate CEO of the Urban League."

This year, Merit Awards went to Citi, Friendly Temple Missionary Baptist Church and the Rev. Michael T. Jones, and President of the Center for Racial Harmony Cheryl Heard.

Chairman of the Civic Committee for the Federation of Block Units Faye Robison received the Stafford Award, and Habitat for Humanity received the Chairman's Award.

The mission of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis is to empower African Americans and others throughout the region in securing economic self-reliance, social equality and civil rights.

Morial and Buford said the Urban League will be the catalyst for this change through advocacy, coalition-building, program services and by promoting communication and understanding among different races and cultures.

The dinner was well-attended by elected officials, including St. Louis Mayor Francis G. Slay, East St. Louis Mayor Alvin Parks Jr. and St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern.

Parks gave greetings to Morial for coming to St. Louis and praised what the Urban League has done for the Metropolitan of St. Louis area.

"We need you now more than ever," Parks said.

Mary Hayes, a retired director of special events for the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis who attended the annual dinner, agreed.

"A lot of people need a lot of help, and the Urban League has resources and they try to provide a hand up on things," Hayes said. "It's a valuable organization."

For more information on the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, visit [www.ulstl.org](http://www.ulstl.org); to pledge with the Urban League's "I Am Empowered" campaign, visit [iamempowered.com](http://iamempowered.com).