

Chautauqua performers shed selves, become historical figures

By Forrest Hartman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Marvin Jefferson knows what it means to walk in the footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. because he's done it.

Jefferson, a professional actor, has portrayed the beloved civil rights leader numerous times, and he's preparing to do it again for Nevada Humanities Chautauqua. The event, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, asks performers to transform themselves into historical figures, offering entertaining and educational monologues and then answering audience questions, both in and out of the historical figure's persona.

"It's not like just doing a monologue," Jefferson said. "You have to know enough about the figure to answer competently."

That means Chautauquans do a lot more than study lines. Jefferson, who also portrays singer, actor and activist Paul Robeson, said it can take between six and 12 months for a Chautauquan to properly prepare a role.

Read the whole story