

Living to tell: Frederick Brewington

February 28, 2008 by JENNIFER BARRIOS / jennifer.barrios@newsday.com

As a young boy in Lakeview, Frederick Brewington met the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. when the civil rights leader toured Long Island in 1965 -- an experience that has stayed with Brewington, now 52 and a civil rights lawyer. Brewington litigated the successful suit against the Town of Hempstead that changed the voting system to be more representative of the town's large minority population.

"I was one of the first students to be involved in the desegregation of the Malverne School District and learned the lesson as to what was going on at that very early age of third grade.

"My involvement in the justice system is, for me, an extension of my beliefs that we can and must make our system one which is just and fair to all.

"There have been a number of very high points so far in the work that my staff and I have done. One of them is the Goosby v. the Town of Hempstead case, where we challenged the at-large voting system in the Town of Hempstead and toppled down the entire form of government, creating for the first time, in the largest township in America, councilmanic districts where African-Americans could select candidates of their choice. It was also an important case because it gave people the opportunity to hope, and know that they could stand tall, face the adversity, face the challenges, face a discriminatory system and change it. And in modern-day civil rights, we don't see those type of victories too often that are so monumental.

"My responsibility is to continue to go forward. Because if we don't raise the issues appropriately to the powers of justice, the powers of justice can't come down to really make a change. We've got to appropriately challenge the halls of power to really make something happen."

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