Online Advocate

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Community celebrates 'King' of civil rights

By Diana Reyes, opinion editor

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The diversity among the audience present at the Knox Center on Jan. 16 was a remarkable asset to the celebration of the 81st birthday of the late Martin Luther King Jr.

Helen Kalkstein, dean of the Communication, Liberal Arts, Skills and Services Division, said King visited Contra Costa College and spoke here on Feb. 14, 1964.

The celebration held a variety of activities, including dances and musical performances from local schools and speeches from community officials such as Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, founder of the event district Governing Board President Anthony Gordon and Contra Costa County District I Supervisor John Gioia, who has attended the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday celebration for over 10 years.

"(It is) a great event and you will leave inspired," Gioia said. "I thank Contra Costa College and President McKinley Williams.

"We must accept finite disappointment," Gioia quoted King. "But never lose infinite hope."

He associated King's words with the current economical crisis. He spoke about the energy and hope the city of Richmond possessed and the importance of not settling with the current status.

McLaughlin described a peace march she attended at MLK Park where young children marched and "shared their hopes and dreams." It was the joy of a generation that will not be held back, she said.

"This event is always a great time to celebrate Martin Luther King and say, 'Thank you, Martin Luther King," she said.

The celebration initiated with a brief moment of silence from sociology department Chairman J. Vern Cromartie, honoring the lives of those affected by the earthquake in Haiti.

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Students from the Speech and Debate Team discussed segregation, lynching and racial prejudice.

They emphasized the importance of "pulling out a seat or two to make sure everyone has a seat at the table of brotherhood."

Also, the celebration hosted a number of entertainment acts. Among those was a musical act headed by Middle College High School students and led by instructor Israel Sims who also performed with the students. Vista High School also performed a number conducted by Sims.

Additionally, the Salesian High School band performed a song by the late Bob Marley, titled "Is This Love?"

The Contra Costa College Gospel Choir, with its performance of the song "We Shall Overcome," served as the closing act.

Other performances were also showcased by the Wilson Elementary Lady Tigers Cheerleading Team, the Richmond College Prep Charter School and El Cerrito High School Dancers and a dance performance by the Mexican Folklorico instructed by Sergio Nicolas.

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