

## Richmond: Thousands attend Juneteenth festival

*By Samantha Clark Oakland Tribune*

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Ellen Daniels Temple, center, sings with the Easterhill Ensemble as they entertain at the 11th annual Juneteenth Family Day Festival in Richmond, Calif., on Saturday, June 28, 2014. The event starts with a parade and culminates with live entertainment, food and informational booths and a play area for the kids. The day is sponsored by the Neighborhood Block Association as well as the City of Richmond and Chevron. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

**RICHMOND** -- Hundreds gathered before noon Saturday at the edge of Nicholl Park in anticipation of the Juneteenth parade as it neared the end of its 2-mile route to the festival.

Folks young and old unfolded their chairs and leaned forward to see if it was near. "When's the parade coming?" they asked one another. "Is it supposed to come from the left or the right?"

Children too impatient to sit and wait chased soccer ball-sized bubbles whirling across the park or chatted while blue and red snow cones dripped down their hands.

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Then the long line of police, politicians, cheerleaders, nonprofits, a caravan of Corvettes and more appeared on Macdonald Avenue from around the corner, and the crowd yelled "Richmond!" on cue.



Fried chicken wings, catfish and fries are ready to plate at the 11th annual Juneteenth Family Day Festival in Richmond, Calif., on Saturday, June 28, 2014. The event starts with a parade and culminates with live entertainment, food and informational booths and a play area for the kids. The day is sponsored by the Neighborhood Block Association as well as the City of Richmond and Chevron. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

Richmond's Juneteenth Family Day Parade and Festival is one of the largest in California and celebrates African-American history. When it started 11 years ago, only about 100 people showed up. Organizers estimated more than 20,000 attended on Saturday.

Gwen Conn has brought A Taste of Soul, her catering company, to the festival every year, serving fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, and greens.

"It's just the atmosphere," she said. "We can't always see the entertainment, but we can hear it and we dance in our booth."

The event showcased gospel, blues, R&B and hip-hop music and a star-studded lineup featuring funk band Slave, local artist Dee Dee Simon, Lucy Pearl, and hometown star Dawn Robinson, once of the popular R&B group En Vogue.

"We pride ourselves on having headliners," said event coordinator Latressa Wilson Alford, "and we've set the trend for other Juneteenths because I've noticed other ones are starting to have other headliners too, which is great."

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Festival goers enjoyed two stages of entertainment, a children's area, a dance contest, a youth poetry slam, a display commemorating Richmond's Black Panther Party and many booths offering food, health screenings and local vendors.

"The Juneteenth celebration is us caring together as one Richmond," said Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, who walked in the parade. "It's reigniting our journey for peace, health and justice. ... It's a celebration of our diversity. That's really our strength."

Juneteenth commemorates the celebration that spontaneously broke out on June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers told slaves in Galveston, Texas, that the Civil War had ended and that they were free. Richmond moved its Juneteenth from June 19 so that celebrations would not overlap, Wilson Alford said.

Jatari Lewis of Richmond has been coming to the Juneteenth festival for as long as he can remember.



Phyllis Ross, left, of Hayward, takes a "selfie" with Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, right, during the parade at the 11th annual Juneteenth Family Day Festival in Richmond, Calif., on Saturday, June 28, 2014. The event starts with a parade and culminates with live entertainment, food and informational booths and a play area for the kids. The day is sponsored by the Neighborhood Block Association as well as the City of Richmond and Chevron. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

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His niece, 10-year-old Khalaija Day, danced and cheered in the parade with the West County Spartans. The Caribbean dance company, Sistas Wit Style, caught her eye.

"This is a great place for kids to learn about programs and get involved," he said. "It's just to support the community and to have a good time."

The event was sponsored by the Neighborhood Block Association, the city of Richmond and Chevron.



Lonnie Dunbar, left, and Michael Daniels, right, both of Richmond, play speed chess while they enjoy the day at the 11th annual Juneteenth Family Day Festival in Richmond, Calif., on Saturday, June 28, 2014. The event starts with a parade and culminates with live entertainment, food and informational booths and a play area for the kids. The day is sponsored by the Neighborhood Block Association as well as the City of Richmond and Chevron. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

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