

Local students march in honor of King



(Robert Rogers/RichmondConfidential)

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Students and teachers from five local schools joined parents and city leaders Friday in a march and celebration in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.

Students assembled at 3:30 p.m. at the corner of Harbour Way and Florida Avenue and walked while chanting peace hymns and toting signs and other crafts made in classrooms. The destination was the city park on Cutting Boulevard that bears the slain civil rights leader's name.



John Gioia, right, and Nicole Valentino, left. (Robert Rogers/Richmond Confidential)

Billed as the “March for Peace,” the event was Richmond’s first major gathering recognizing King’s contributions to American history this year, although a series of public marches and commemorations are scheduled through Monday.

“It’s a great event,” said Otheree Christian, president of the Iron Triangle Neighborhood Association. “Dr. King fought for the rights of everybody, and when the kids get out and actively celebrate that legacy they appreciate it even more.”

The procession of hundreds walked a few blocks west on Harbour Way and then circled the track at Martin Luther King Jr. Park before stopping to share songs, essays, speeches and birthday cake in honor of King.

Elected officials on hand included Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, Councilwoman Jovanka Beckles, County Supervisor John Gioia and State Senator Mark DeSaulnier. Uniformed police and National Park Service Rangers also attended the event, both as participants and security.

Gioia addressed the crowd of schoolchildren, teachers and parents. He urged the kids to follow King’s message, which he said emphasized the question “How do we care for our fellow person?”

McLaughlin, walking with a cane due to a recent knee surgery, also addressed the crowd. She quoted present-day civil rights leader Cornel West, telling the children “Justice is what love looks like in public.”

The event was coordinated by students and parents from Richmond College Prep Schools, Lincoln Elementary School, Coronado Elementary School, Nystrom Elementary School, and Leadership Public School-Richmond. Other partners included Sims Metal Management, Richmond Rockets, Urban Tilth, Richmond Community Foundation, West Contra Costa Unified School District, National Park Service, Nystrom United ReVitalization Effort (NURVE), and Santa Fe, Coronado, and Iron Triangle residents.

This year marks the fifth consecutive year that schools and community leaders have organized the March for Peace, as well as the march's largest year; it began with only one school participating, Richmond College Prep.

“The message is even bigger than just MLK,” said Joe Alexander, 34, a lifelong Richmond resident who marched Friday with his 7-year-old son, Camerin. “It’s about building peace on the streets of Richmond, and the kids marching as leaders toward that cause.”



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