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East Bay cities celebrate King's legacy

By Paul Burgarino and Shelly Meron
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Residents throughout the East Bay took part in events Monday honoring the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Using King's message to end local violence was the focus in Pittsburg, where Lillian Hornbeck was among those who marched along Railroad Avenue from Pittsburg City Hall to Marina Vista Elementary School singing, "peace in Pittsburg streets someday," to the tune of the famous civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome."

"What we want is peace, not just here in Pittsburg but everywhere," said Hornbeck, who is part of Sista Souljas, a community group dedicated toward preventing violence. Nonviolence was a big part of King's message, she said.

The civil rights icon's birthday was first celebrated as a national holiday 25 years ago.

Hundreds attended the eighth annual Pittsburg event, which included youth dance, poetry performances and speeches from the mothers of several local young men whose lives were cut short by violence in the past year.

Several hundred West Contra Costa residents gathered to honor King at El Cerrito High School with music and song, dance, poetry, speeches and

prayer.

The annual celebration, organized by the city of El Cerrito and the West Contra Costa school district, was led by Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley, who called on audience members to honor King's legacy by being more open-minded toward those who disagree with them.

"Every day, we must take in the message of Dr. Martin

Luther King," she said, urging more civility in today's political discourse. "There is no tolerance for violence or violent rhetoric in this democracy."

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, of Richmond, agreed.

"We can hold ourselves out as models. We can disagree with what people say, but not demonize," he said.

The event also featured a performance by the El Cerrito High School marching band, the singing of "God Bless America," students' essays about King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and words from the Rev. Darrell Wesley, pastor at St. James CME Church in Salinas.

The event closed with a performance by the Bay Area Line Dancers.

About 300 people came to the theater at Deer Valley High School in Antioch for a joint program by the city and school district honoring King. Former Antioch councilman Reggie Moore, the city's first African-American councilman, was recognized for creating the program three years ago.

A march in Livermore and a community event in Alamo helped celebrate King's birthday in the Tri-

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Valley.

In Livermore, Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment) sponsored a downtown march that was followed by a group reading of King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech at the fountain at First Street and South Livermore Avenue.

In Alamo, residents gathered for a late-afternoon celebration of King's birthday at the Wesley Center at San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church. Using music and video clips, the program also featured several other peacemakers whose lives exemplify King's spirit.

Meanwhile, hundreds honored King's legacy by riding the annual "Freedom Train" between San Jose and San Francisco.

The tradition started 27 years ago as a way to remember King's historic march in Alabama from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. The train covers 54 miles along Caltrain's tracks, which equal the number of miles between Selma and Montgomery.

Freedom Train riders joined San Francisco's annual Martin Luther King parade once the train arrived at Fourth and King Streets.

ABC7 News contributed to this story.

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