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Antioch remembers legacy, vision of Civil Rights leader

By Paul Bugarino
Contra Costa Times

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ANTIOCH -- A celebration of the legacy and vision of Martin Luther King Jr. drew about 300 people to the Deer Valley High School theater on Monday afternoon.

The third annual program, hosted by the city and school district, featured dances, songs and speeches by winners of a youth essay contest.

Before the event, attendees viewed a film of King's speeches. After a rendition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by the Deer Valley Divine Voices choir, a bevy of elected officials gave opening remarks.

Antioch Mayor Jim Davis reminded the crowd that it's been 25 years since the third Monday in January was made a national holiday in honor of the civil rights pioneer. Unfortunately, too many people treat it like any other day, he said.

Federal Glover, the first African-American elected to the county Board of Supervisors, said that while people still draw from King's legacy, his dream of equality has not yet been attained.

Hatred, disparity, violence and bigotry still exist in the world, Glover said, pointing to the Jan. 8 shooting in Tucson, Ariz., as well as stories of young people dying and dealing drugs in the streets and Internet postings.

"If you really want to honor the man, if you really want to honor his legacy, memories are not enough. It is up to us to work to carry out the dream," he said.

Keynote speaker Wade Harper, Antioch's mayor pro tem and the first African-American police lieutenant in Tracy, spoke of the

need to keep King's vision alive in serving the community.

"There is no finish line. Whether it's total peace or trying to improve our city, there has to be a continual striving toward how we want it to be in the future," Harper said.

Civic leaders also recognized former city councilman Reggie Moore for creating the event two years ago. Moore was the first African-American to serve on the council.

Moore said he started the event to challenge kids to remember King's message of civil rights and further his dream. The message has been diluted over the years, he said.

Later in the afternoon, Deer Valley student Naja Phillips performed a praise dance as an interpretation of the gospel song "The Struggle is Over," while Antioch High seniors Kelhani Ross and Marshae Collins sang a song they wrote in tribute to King.

The lyrics "they just hating on me, let them haters hate," reflect King's determination to seek racial equality despite his detractors, Collins said.

The program included an arts scholarship program for middle school and high school students who live within the Antioch school district boundaries.

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Devonaire Bryant of Los Medanos College was recognized for his winning work in 2009 at the program.

This year's entries will be judged in April.

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SCHOLARSHIP

The Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship program is open to middle and high school students who reside in the Antioch Unified School District boundaries. The application deadline is 4 p.m. March 24. Applications can be submitted online at www.art4antioch.org or mailed or delivered to the district office, 510 G St., Antioch, 94509. Judging will take place in April.

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