

West Valley View

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PebbleCreek event honors MLK

by Rachel Trott

staff writer

Only a few empty seats remained at PebbleCreek's Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on Monday as the audience stood together to sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

The event was organized by the Just Folks Association of PebbleCreek and featured speakers such as the Rev. Cathy Patterson of the Fountain of Life Church in Scottsdale, the Rev. Gae Chalker of the St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Litchfield Park and Pastor Harry Heinrich of the PebbleCreek Community Church in Goodyear.



GOODYEAR RESIDENTS MAYBE FOSTER, right, and his wife, Evelin, recite lines of a speech during a Martin Luther King Jr. Day event Monday in PebbleCreek. View photo by Michael Clawson

Connie Montgomery, the chair of the celebration's planning committee, started organizing the event two years ago with her sister, Muriel Hiller.

"I came along in the era of Martin Luther King, so the fact is that throughout my whole lifetime I've been trying to keep his dream alive, and that is one of the reasons why I started doing this," Montgomery said. "I personally felt that I didn't want him to just die away like all the other important people in history whose names only come up when there's a big issue."

Youth involvement

The voices of children and young adults were also heard at the event with church choirs, praise dancers from Antioch Church of God-in-Christ in Peoria and speeches written by three students from around the West Valley.

Celina Gallego, an eighth grader at Marley Park Elementary, spoke about how Martin Luther King Jr. and his fight for freedom inspired her.

Thor Island, a ninth grader at Arizona School for the Arts, spoke about other issues he saw as inequalities in modern society.

"I think that if Martin Luther King was here today he wouldn't be just satisfied stopping at racial rights, he'd still be fighting to make society better, and that's why I think he'd also want to focus on LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual] rights and other issues of inequality."

Hiller described the students' speeches as one of her favorite parts of the event.

"I'm a crier," she said. "I don't usually cry when I'm sad, I cry when I'm happy, so those youngsters reading what they had written just really got to me. I thought it was so wonderful."

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Common threads

For Crystal Williams, a sophomore studying history at Estrella Mountain Community College, a common thread throughout both her speech and the event was pride and love.

"I noticed that a lot of people in their speeches touched on the subject of love, and that was Dr. King's biggest thing that he got from Gandhi. He thought that with love you could solve any problem you could think of," she said. "I was so happy that when I looked around, there were people from all different colors there and you just had a real sense of pride walking in there, not just as an African-American, but as just an American. It was wonderful."

For Montgomery, her mission to keep Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream alive with the event was a success, but there's still some work to do, she said.

"I think the message got across to people, and hopefully we can make changes and people will be more willing to really get out and help keep the dream alive. There's just so much going on in the world right now and we have to try to keep an even keel. We have to let people know that regardless of who you are, we are all the same."

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