

From the front page



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PARADES continued from 1B

civil rights icon's legacy in today's fractured political climate.

In downtown St. Petersburg, the music surged as the 32nd annual MLK Dream Big parade began, baton-twirlers and drummers marching past 40,000 people on the day marking King's birth.

Sequined dancers in white boots whirled under an overcast sky, while kids on the sidewalk matched their rhythm. Politicians and activists threw beads and waved like pageant queens.

One sign saying "Thank you Barack and Michelle" drew sustained applause, a bittersweet moment as the nation's first black president prepares to step down. "Thanks, Obama!" people shouted, while a woman chimed in, "That's my president."

"What worries me is how angry our president-elect seems to be," said Valerie Haynes, 63, of St. Petersburg. "He has to find a way to pull the people of this country together. We're a diverse country, there's no getting around that, and a house divided will not stand."

Bouncing her grandson as firetrucks roared by, Rebecca Russell-Gootee said she hopes 7-month-old Amiel and others come to understand how much work is left to do.

As a multiracial family, she said, she felt judgment from her black and white neighbors alike.

"We didn't always know which side of the street to stand on," Russell-Gootee said. She taught her children to see the world through rainbow-colored glasses.

"We should appreciate each other's differences, and understand and respect them," she added.

Lindy Harmon-Sherman, 57, summed up King's message like this: "We can learn from each other. That's what makes us strong. That's what makes us great in the first place."

St. Petersburg police said the parade went off without a hitch, with no incidents of note beyond a food truck fire and a few kids who were separated from their families.

"I think it was smoother than last year," said Officer Mike Hughbanks. The parade had new



Marchers with St. John Missionary Baptist Church depart from North Greenwood Recreation Center in Clearwater en route to Coachman Park while participating in the city's 33rd annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day march Monday.

Photos by DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times



Flora Falana, 5, of Clearwater, left, snuggles with her grandmother, Brenda Hunter of Clearwater, during Clearwater's 33rd annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration on Monday. The city's march drew more than 600 people.

See the celebrations



Thousands came out to remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy around the bay area. tampabay.com/photo-gallery/alleyes.

Washington, D.C., standing near the reflecting pool as he proclaimed, "I have a dream."

If King had not been assassinated in 1968, he would have turned 88 on Sunday.

"He would say we have an obligation to each other to do the best we can with what we have," Griffin said. That includes respecting the president-elect, she said, while still keeping history alive for those who didn't live it.

"This too shall change," she said. "Dr. King's dream will live on. You can't kill a dream. It lives in the heart of the people."

A group called 813 Stop the Violence plastered a trailer with the photos of four dozen people fatally shot in the Tampa area. One was Nico Crawford,

who died when two men opened fire into a crowd gathered at Al Barnes Park on Easter in 2014.

His mother, Kenya Robinson, carried a sign: "All life matters. We can, we shall, we will stop the violence."

Clearwater's march down Drew Street to Coachman Park drew more than 600 people.

"We concentrate on staying true to what Martin Luther King did," said Marva McWhite, incoming president of the Clearwater area's NAACP branch. "We don't have a parade with floats and things. We march like he did."

About 100 people paid tribute to King at a breakfast in Ridgecrest, the predominantly black unincorporated area surrounded by Largo.

"It's a day on, not a day off," minister Patrick Helm said to those gathered at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. "Help us, Lord, to always be reminded of the justice that should be turned on in our lives."

After the St. Petersburg parade, families flocked to the parking lot of Tropicana Field, where the scents of garlicky crab legs and barbecue wafted through the air. Kids piled into inflatable fun houses while music thumped.

"He was a man about peace, and we need to build peace going forward from here on out," said Stefan Smith, 43, of Tuskegee, Ala., while snapping photos of the fanfare.

Keeping King's dream alive is up to the nation's leaders, he said. So he wasn't happy to see President-elect Donald Trump dismiss the legacy of U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., a civil rights icon himself who suffered a fractured skull when he and other marchers were beaten by Alabama state troopers while trying to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965.

Jae Phillips, 35, agreed. He said that the incoming president has not eased the nation's racial divide. As Phillips pushed his child in a stroller, he worried the rift may deepen.

"It's still a long way to go," he said. "But we've come a long way as well."

Times staff writers Divya Kumar, Lavendrick Smith, Tony Marrero, Kathryn Varn and Piper Castillo contributed to this report. Contact Claire McNeill at cmcneill@tampabay.com or (727) 893-8321.

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