

MLK celebrated near where he once spoke

By [Jonathan Horn \(/staff/jonathan-horn/\)](#) 5:07 p.m. Jan. 21, 2013



[\(/photos/2013/jan/21/772582/\)](#)

Leticia Ayala, associate director of programs for the Environmental Health Coalition, left, greets Cynthia McGee Burton as she came off the stage after performing "I believe I can fly" with her group. — *John Gastaldo*

Half a century ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the Calvary Baptist Church in Barrio Logan.

On Monday, more than 600 people gathered in a renovated warehouse near the church to celebrate his day.

Organizers of the 25th annual All Peoples Celebration, which was previously held at hotels, said they moved the event to Barrio Logan so it would be in the same neighborhood where the civil-rights leader once visited. It was a morning of poetry, song and speeches as attendees reflected on the past and expressed optimism for the future under the event theme of "The Art of Change."

"Today is a day of calibration and connection," said Andrea Guerrero, executive director of the host organization, Alliance San Diego. "We're going to calibrate how far we've come and how far we have yet to go, and hopefully we'll connect. We'll connect with the past, the present and the future. We'll connect with one another."

The All Peoples' Celebration was one of numerous events around San Diego County on Monday that honored King, who visited San Diego multiple times.

More than 500 people cleared brush and performed other community service at an interfaith event in National City. At the San Diego Food Bank, about 100 volunteers from Kaiser Permanente packed food for seniors. In Oceanside, the North San Diego chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People hosted its annual prayer breakfast and birthday celebration for King. And at the Joe and Vi Jacobs Center in Fairmont Village, people gathered for the 18th annual Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Breakfast.

In Barrio Logan, attendees recalled gave perspective on their life experiences.

Ashley Walker, 64, who is African American, grew up outside Montgomery, Ala. during the era of segregation. In an interview, she recalled a story of being 6 years old when she tried to board the school bus on the first day with her best friend, who was a white boy. The bus was filled with white children, who saw Walker and her friend holding hands. Walker got kicked off the bus, but her friend did not and came home from school beaten.

"One of the things I've tried to do is live my life in a way that people understand that if you want change, you have to be the change," said Walker, a speaker at the event. "We are the generation that started putting the nails and setting the structure. Things are different now and things are changing now. And we're in the transition of turning the organizations, the structures, over to younger people who want to do it differently."

One of those from the younger generation is Victoria Crosdale, 15, from El Cajon. She took the stage with the Gospel Signing Choir at the same event.

"It means a lot to be able to perform representing someone that has changed the lives of many," said the Mount Miguel High School

sophomore. "It's just overwhelming."

San Diego Mayor Bob Filner, who delivered the keynote speech, recalled being 13 and meeting King. Filner was arrested at 18 as a freedom rider, trying to instill desegregation in the south. He spent two months in a Mississippi jail before the Supreme Court overturned his arrest.

"What that whole experience taught me and what, as I call him Martin, taught me, was that when you get involved in the political life of your nation, you can change history," Filner told reporters before his speech. "We changed American history. We didn't make it perfect, but we changed history, and for someone who was 18 to understand that motivated me for the rest of my life."

© Copyright 2013 The San Diego Union-Tribune, LLC. An MLIM LLC Company. All rights reserved.