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Lively ceremony kicks off events celebrating MLK

By Angela Hill, STAFF WRITER
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OAKLAND — The city celebrated the passion and vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during a vibrant lunchtime ceremony in downtown Oakland Friday, the first of many events planned throughout the holiday weekend marking what would have been the slain civil rights leader's 79th birthday.

"He knew that if you want things to change, change begins with you," keynote speaker Joseph Marshall told the crowd of about 350 at the fifth annual Oakland Celebrates the Dream event before City Hall.

Marshall is founder and president of the Street Soldiers National Consortium and co-founder and executive director of the Omega Boys Club in San Francisco.

"(King) didn't wait," Marshall told the audience. "He organized. He jumped headlong into the fray. So to all of us today, my question is: Where is the King in you? What do you want to change in Oakland? What does his struggle mean to us as we stand here today, 40 years after his death?"

"What good did it do to win the right to ride the bus if you're going to ride it, tear it down and destroy everybody and everything on it?"

In addition to Marshall's speech and comments from city officials, a rousing musical performance by the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir highlighted the event. Oakland Technical High School student Devon King gave a moving recitation of King's famed "I Have a Dream" speech as dancer Carla Service performed an interpretive dance to the poignant words.

At the close of the program, King's

niece, Alveda King, spoke briefly, thanking the people of Oakland for "honoring my uncle in this special way," she said to cheers from the crowd, concluding by leading everyone in the singing of "We Shall Overcome."

Alveda King's appearance was a welcome but unexpected one for Oakland, city officials said. King was in Frank Ogawa Plaza as part of a separate rally organized by a group of African-American pro-life activists from the Union City-based [Issues4Life Foundation](#).

She was to be a keynote speaker for that group and then lead a Walk for Life through downtown. Alveda King said she had originally been scheduled to speak at the city's event honoring her uncle, but was "disinvited," she said, when her pro-life agenda was discovered.

"Our program and date and everything were set months ago," Roberts said. "At no time was (Alveda King) ever on the program, or subsequently uninvited. In fact, we didn't even know she would be at this other event until last week."

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Roberts said Alveda King and her supporters walked over from their event to the King celebration and asked for King to be allowed to speak.

"She was very gracious," Roberts said. "She merely asked if at any time in the program we could fit her in and we were happy to give her a few moments."

At the conclusion of the King celebration, Alveda King returned to the group of about 50 pro-life activists, who had purposely scheduled their rally to coincide with the King event to point out their belief that fighting abortion is a civil rights cause. The group then marched through downtown Oakland, accompanied by about 20 pro-choice activists, who were advocating legal abortion.

Another pro-life march is planned for today in San Francisco.

Contact Angela Hill at ahill@bayareanewsgroup.com or 510-208-6493.

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