

King Parade, Week, Focus On Peace



STARTING EARLY. A young drummer concentrates on his part during last year's parade.
—Gazette file photo

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Councilman Dee Andrews says he wants to begin the new year with peace and replace hate with love in Long Beach. Fortunately, there's a day in January when all Americans are reminded to do just that: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

For the third year as the Sixth District's Councilman, Andrews is hosting the 22nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace & Unity Parade Celebration at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 16. The parade will start at the intersection of Anaheim Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, proceed north on Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, turn right on 19th Street, and then left on Lemon Avenue, ending at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, 1950 Lemon Ave.

The theme for this year's parade and Peace Week events, which began Saturday, Jan. 9, and ends Sunday, Jan. 17, is "Strength to Love," the name of Dr. King's 1963 book.

"The Doctor (King) would be turning over in his grave if he could see what was happening on our streets now," Andrews said. "He died for love and showing peace toward one another. It's not a race thing in Long Beach. It's a gang thing that's causing this violence. If ever there was a time to embrace each other and to reach out, it's now. It may be hard, but everybody needs compassion."

Because Andrews said King's teachings need to be emphasized more in schools and the community, he began Peace Week — eight days of activities to instill a peaceful environment and raise consciousness of why there is a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

For example, Saturday, Jan. 9, continued the tradition of the annual Candlelight Peace March, only this year's was to remember the tragic death of Wilson High 16-year-old student Melody Ross on Friday, Oct. 30. Ross was shot in the crossfire of a gang-related shooting after a Wilson versus Poly High football game.

The City Council meeting at 5 p.m. Tuesday will honor the three recipients of the Third Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Maker Award. In addition to Walter Neil of British Petroleum and Pastor Wayne Chaney of Antioch Church Long Beach, Michelle Molina, the founder of PeacePartners, Inc. (which manages the PeaceBuilders curriculum), will accept an award for her organization's efforts to reduce violence in Long Beach.

"The program is really about educating parents, law enforcement, community members, teachers and anyone who has connections with children on a daily basis on how to reduce conflict and keep kids from being interested in joining gangs," Molina said.

A former algebra and science teacher in Paramount who taught PeaceBuilders curriculum to children in her classes, Molina said she decided to buy the company and expand the scope of the program, which is now at 1,200 sites and in 44 states. In Long Beach, PeaceBuilders is incorporated into two of the city's police beats, Molina added.

"Although we're nationwide, we spend a fair amount of our time in Long Beach because we live here," said Molina, a 20-year resident of Long Beach. "I'd like to see the curriculum in the schools here."

From 4:30 to 7 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday in Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, a youth/police dialogue will give law enforcement officials and area children a chance to talk in a non-threatening environment. Andrews said the dialogues are a part of Peace Week because police are important role models for children.

A new addition this year is the First Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Minister Luncheon from noon to 2 p.m. Friday, Jan. 15, at the park, 1950 Lemon Ave. Long Beach ministers will congregate and discuss King's teachings. Later that evening at 5 p.m., "Dreamland," the children and teen area, will open.

John Edmond, Andrews's chief of staff, said "Dreamland" rides for children ages 5 to 12 will be free on Jan. 16. The celebration following the parade from noon to 5 p.m. also will include two entertainment stages, a health pavilion and food and merchandise vendors.

On Jan. 16, feeder streets to Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue will be closed from 5:30 a.m. to noon along the parade route. Parking will be available at Long Beach City College at the corner of Orange Avenue and Pacific Coast Highway. From 7:30 to 10:30 a.m., shuttle buses will transport participants from this parking lot to the parade route.

Edmond said 105 entries will be in the parade this year. The Grand Marshal will be NFL pro football player Willie McGinest, and Youth Honorary Grand Marshals will be represented by Charlie Brown and Ronald McDonald.

The Peace Week events and parade are co-sponsored by the Long Beach Department of Parks, Recreation & Marine, the City of Long Beach Human Dignity Program, and the Long Beach Weed & Seed Program.