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13th annual event in Cross City celebrates Martin Luther King's legacy



A- Earlene Geathers said Martin Luther King's legacy lives on today.

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CROSS CITY
-- Hundreds of people lined U.S. Highway 19 in downtown Cross

City Monday (Jan. 21) for the 13th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Parade.



Pierre Peterson, a military veteran and native son of Dixie County, carries a banner with his cousin Connie Carter celebrating the 13th Annual Martin Luther King Parade.

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A marcher carries the American flag in the parade.



The Dixie County High School Marching Band performs for the crowd.

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2018 Dixie County High School Homecoming Queen Mareena Johnson smiles at the crowd.



Bringing up the back of the parade, a group of Dixie County horse riders.

After the parade, residents participated in a small festival in the parking lot across from the Dixie County Courthouse.

The parade and festival honored the memory and achievements of King, a powerful voice in the 1960s civil rights movement.

Earlene Geathers of Cross City said she believes King's legacy had gone a long way toward helping the black community achieve voting rights, the right to freedom of speech and harmony between the races.

She said she can see how King's most famous speech, "I Have a Dream," has come into being in today's society.

"You can see how it has progressed; there's no more whites against blacks and blacks against whites. Y'all trying to live together as one family. I believe in his I have a dream legacy because it has come about," Geathers said.

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Pierre Peterson grew up in Cross City and graduated from Dixie County High School. The retired military officer joined his older cousin, Connie Carter, in carrying a banner celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. in the parade.

Peterson said he is familiar with the local culture in Cross City and Dixie County. His mother is a local preacher. Peterson said he knows about the “shortcomings and the gains” that have been made locally. He said it is important to remember Dr. King and what he meant to everyone in the country.

“I think it is very important,” Peterson said. “Not only was he a formidable voice in the black community, he was a formidable voice worldwide. He won the Noble Peace Prize. He was an adamant speaker of peace. Nothing about him was about violence. It was always about coming together and working as a unit for the common good”

Peterson said Dr. King was the focal point not only for men of color but for all men.

“I hope the message today is Cross City is on the move and making things happen,” Peterson said. “I hope we can continue to take this community and be at the forefront of change. I hope we just stay together as a people because that’s the only way we are going to make it in a world full of division. If you can find your spot in it and do your part, it will be a better world than you wanted, and that was his message.”

One of the more unusual participants in the parade shared a different perspective. He is a black man who was dressed in a Confederate uniform carrying a Confederate flag. His name is H.K. Edgerton of Asheville, N.C.

This North Carolina resident said he is an honorary member of the Judah P. Benjamin Camp #2210, Sons of the Confederacy of Tampa. Edgerton marched in the parade with other camp members.

Edgerton said “King got it right” with regard to the civil rights movement. Edgerton said he is a former president and vice president of the NAACP in the Asheville area.

Edgerton is proud of his family members who served in the Confederacy. He said the fact that black people fought for the Confederacy isn’t well known but he believes it is true.

Regarding Dr. King, Edgerton said one of King’s lieutenants in the civil rights movement, Andrew Young, came to Nashville years ago and was a speaker at a local school. Edgerton said he asked Young what King would have said about the attacks on the Confederate battle flag.

In his speech, Young answered Edgerton’s question, telling a story about King being asked by his loyal lieutenants, Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Ralph Abernathy how he would feel about attacking the Confederate battle flag.

Edgerton said King gave this reply.

“Leave it alone. Let’s do something about the things we can do something about – a baby standing over there with her pants hanging down dealing dope, can’t vote, no hope,” Edgerton said, quoting Young in his address in Nashville.

According to Edgerton, Young said King instructed his lieutenants that rather than fight against a symbol from the past, instead to focus on social and vertical mobility for women in the job place and “affordable housing for all of God’s children.”