BOCA RATON

Strains of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" rang through Pearl City, where early Monday the community celebrated Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy as the historic anthem suggests:

"Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, Let us march on 'til victory is won."

About 50 people gathered at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in front of Ebenezer Baptist Church to celebrate King's message of unity and nonviolence, and to commemorate the civil rights movement in South Florida with songs, speeches and a march to Mizner Park.

"For Boca, it's just showing that we all as a community can come together and celebrate his birthday — black, white, every creed — that we can all be as one," said Yvonne Chisolm, a member of Ebenezer Baptist who attended the celebration.

The Rev. Winston Anderson, minister at Ebenezer Baptist, opened the celebration with a prayer asking God to energize the community to live out King's teachings, and speakers echoed the sentiment for about an hour before the crowd marched south to Mizner Park.

"We look back 43 years since his speech, and can we not say the same things?" asked Mack Dennis, deacon of Friendship Baptist Church in Boca Raton. "I'm not sure the dream is realized yet. We have to bring that about."

The message of nonviolence is especially relevant to a nation left reeling in the wake of the shootings in Tuscon, said Rose Gaetens, director of Holocaust and human rights education at Florida Atlantic University.

"We live in a community that cries out for the wisdom of Dr. King's vision," she said.

That wisdom is especially important to pass along to children, said the Rev. Calvin Davis, the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church.

"I'm excited that, growing up here in Boca, I've seen the changes that have taken place from the '60s all the way through 2011," he said. "It's important to let our young people know how we got to this place."
Pearl City, Boca Raton's historically black community, played a unique role in those changes, said Barbara Williams, who grew up in the community and who shared some of the neighborhood's history.

After the speeches, the Boca Raton High School marching band led the procession to Mizner Park, where dancers and musicians performed.

"I think this brings meaning to the civil rights movement and our community," said Grace Hadley, who coordinated the event. "It brings people together so we can live the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King."

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