

THINGS TO DO

Vallejo celebration: One parade, many voices

Celebration highlights the good in Vallejo, despite fears



In a silent protest, former Vallejo City Councilwoman Cristina Arriola wears a Ballet Folklorico dress and holds a no ICE sign as she rides with the Vallejo Sister Cities Association during the 4th of July Parade in Vallejo on Friday. Several groups, including the Solano AIDS Coalition and the Ballet Folklorico schools, did not take part in the parade. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)



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As float after float went by in Vallejo's Fourth of July Parade, the crowd cheered and waved from camping chairs along the parade route. Although the country remains divided over political and social issues, many Vallejoans saw the parade as a chance to unite in community.

The parade began at 10 a.m., but an hour before, floats and cars were lining up and dedicated parade-goers were setting up their chairs.

With news of potential cuts to Medicaid and a crackdown on immigration from the Trump administration, for some, it feels like a difficult time to celebrate the United States. However, those at the Fourth of July Parade in Vallejo had a different take, instead highlighting the diversity of the community and how it brings people together.



Rueben Hughes leaps over two kids to break a board during a flying kick as he takes part in Friday's 4th of July Parade with William Kim's Tae Kwon Do Center. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

Grand Marshal of the Parade this year was Tom Bartee, the former district director for state Sen. Bill Dodd at the California State Senate. "I'm really humbled by being selected. I know the Vallejo Parade is an awesome parade," he said just before the parade began.

Bartee has been involved with the Fourth of July Parade for about 20 years, he said. For Bartee, part of what makes Vallejo's parade special is the diversity of the community represented in the floats. "It's a chance for everybody to display the various aspects of their part of the community."

Chelsea Grant, who was born and raised in Vallejo, was ready to watch the parade on Sonoma Boulevard just before the cars, trucks, and floats began rolling through. Despite growing up in Vallejo, this was Grant's first time attending the parade, this time with her 6-month-old son.

"I think Vallejo's such a great community and it really shines when everyone's together like this," said Grant. Events like the parade remind her what's really important, which she said is the people right around us.

Members of the Caravanas Truck Club danced through the parade to the sounds of Spanish music, played by a live band and pulled by one of the club's trucks. Before the parade began, Camila Gonzalez and Danila Flores of Caravanas agreed that going to events like the parade was the best part of the club. They were looking forward to enjoying the day and keeping the truck club and music tradition alive.

For annual parade-goers, there were a few noticeable absences this year. Most notably, there were no Ballet Folklórico dancers and fewer Dancing Horses than normal. Former City Councilwoman Cristina Arriola wore a pink ballet folklórico dress in the parade in protest and in recognition of the difficulties currently facing members of the Latino community.

So while some groups made the difficult decision to withdraw from the parade, for those who felt able, the parade was also an opportunity to engage potential voters and advertise political change.



Vallejo Mayor Andrea Sorce talks about the diversity of Vallejo and how important it was to represent everyone by incorporating several different flags in the vehicles carrying the council during the 4th of July parade on Friday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

Judith Lerner was at the parade handing out fliers for an upcoming National Day of Action on July 17. The event, co-sponsored by Vallejo-Benicia Indivisible, The League of Women Voters Solano and the Vallejo-Benicia AAUW, will celebrate the life and legacy of John Lewis and register people to vote.

Although Lerner opposes many of the actions of the United States government in recent months, she was clad head to toe in red, white and blue on Friday morning,

handing out American flags.

To Lerner, celebrating the Fourth of July is about celebrating “our liberty, our constitution and our rights as Americans to participate in the democratic process,” she said. “We in Vallejo are blessed to be very diverse,” said Lerner, adding that bringing the community together to celebrate America’s liberty is “a wonderful thing.”

The parade wrapped up by 12 p.m., but as people drove by the recently-opened streets, kids honked horns out of car windows and passersby shouted “happy fourth!” to one another. Despite the current political turmoil, Vallejoans were largely happy to have a chance to celebrate.



Freedom Cook dances in the street as a group from Churches United sing during the Vallejo 4th of July parade on Friday in downtown Vallejo. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)