



Community pitches in to honor King

About 100 people participated in community service projects.

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By MARIA P. GONZALEZ of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA -- Area residents marked the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday by making the day off a day "on," as part of a national day of service.

Service projects coordinated through Whitman College drew about 100 community members and students, and concluded with a quiet march from downtown to Reid Campus Center's Young Ballroom.

Andres Dankel-Ibañez, assistant director of the Intercultural Center at Whitman College, said he and close to 10 volunteers spent the afternoon with Commitment to Community clearing trash and debris near 13th Avenue and U.S. Highway 12. He was amazed by how much trash they amassed.

"We found a laptop," he said. It was turned over to the community group.

The clean-up was one of about 10 service projects coordinated throughout the area. Volunteers picked up assignments at Whitman and carpoled to various locations. The volunteers worked from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., then were asked to meet at the downtown Land Title Plaza for the candlelight march to the campus. About 50 people, including families with young children, turned out in freezing weather for the walk.

Once indoors, hot coffee, hot chocolate and cookies greeted the participants, as well as soft jazz from the Whitman Jazz Combo.

Whitman College President George Bridges spoke briefly and thanked participants.

"Let's remember each of us has a responsibility to contribute to change," he said.

One volunteer, Casey Monahan, had the day off from teaching English at Walla Walla High School. But she knew before the holiday rolled around that she wanted to mark the day with service.

She learned about the Whitman event, and showed up with her 6-year-old daughter, Sadie, for an assignment.

Together, mom and daughter helped wash windows at the recently vacated Blue Mountain Humane Society thrift shop.

"I wanted her to have that experience," Monahan said about sharing the day with her daughter. She said they had spent part of the weekend learning about King.

The combination of celebrating King's legacy, and marking President Barack Obama's inauguration, drew Monahan to find a fitting project. Giving back to her community was the obvious choice.

"I'm just really inspired right now," she said.

Dankel-Ibañez noted the holiday was billed as "a day on, not a day off," as part of the national volunteer effort.

The projects were coordinated by the college's Intercultural Center and Center for Community Service, together with Walla Walla's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program.



Whitman College senior Stephen Parkin keeps his hands warm over a candle while talking to Jill Laney (also a Whitman College senior) before the march. U-B photo by Matthew B. Zimmerman

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