

Salem's first Race Unity Day draws diverse participants

BY JILLIAN DALEY

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As the Postell family of Salem hurried toward the shelter of the Riverfront Park pavilion Sunday afternoon, rain plopped on their heads.

Derrick Postell and his wife shepherded their three children quickly from the parking lot to the overhang for a picnic in honor of Race Unity Day.

Postell saw the event, which drew about 40 people, as an opportunity to promote understanding among the races.

"There's really not that much of a difference between us," he said. "We're all seeking love."

It was the first Race Unity Day in Salem, though the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States inaugurated the observance in 1957.

Similar events occur throughout the nation.

Event organizer Hamid Behmard said the picnic's premise speaks to the core of the Baha'i faith.

"Race unity ... is the main theme of the Baha'i faith," Behmard said.

Behmard hopes this year's inaugural event will create a tradition.

"We just felt it was something we needed to do," he said.

Though organized by the Baha'is, the event was open to all.

Entertainment included children's games -- a large piece of parachute material was lifted into the wind -- and music from many cultures.

Also featured at the celebration were Mexican folk dancing, African drumming and a tribute to The Beatles.

Singer Anisa Foroughi performed a selection that included "In My Life."

Before she strode to the microphone, she had sat down to a meal of fried chicken and potato salad amid a diverse crowd: Mexican, Chinese, Pakistani, Iranian, African, Caucasian.

As someone who grew up attending Baha'i events, Foroughi said the culturally varied gathering was nothing new.



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Brenda Velasquez (from left), Deserie Balbaneda, Synthia Mendez and Monica Contreras, all members of the Washington Elementary Multicultural Dance Club, perform on Sunday during the Baha'i of Salem Race Unity Day at the Salem Riverfront Park.

About Baha'i

For more information about the Baha'is of Salem, call (503) 362-6645, or go to www.bahaisofsalem.org.

"It feels like home," she said.