

Rochester's Juneteenth offers fun, learning

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Rochester's official Juneteenth celebration was a homecoming, a celebration and a show of strength in the face of challenging issues facing Black people in New York and all Americans.

Serious topics provided context for everything happening Saturday at Martin Luther King Jr. park:

- Housing
- Mental health
- Legal rights
- Education
- Business opportunities

The Democrat and Chronicle was there with executive editor Mike Kilian and journalists Justice Marbury, Kayla Canne, Madison Scott, Lucy Manvelian, Christina Chkarboul and William Ramsey. We spoke to community members about what was on their minds — and about what stories you think the D&C needs to cover, especially to reflect the full richness of the Black community.

Story ideas? Contact Marbury, our 19th Ward reporter, at jmarbury@democratandchronicle.com.

Pay heed to our history

It is vital “now more than ever that all of these young folks — Black, white, blue and in between — understand that Black history is American history,” said Mayor Malik Evans in framing the reason the upcoming Juneteenth holiday is important for everyone.

He and others spoke to a happy crowd on the lawn at MLK Park amid one of the perfect outdoor days this year in Rochester. Vendors sold wares, children played, conversation and photos were exchanged and civic topics were discussed. The whole community was represented.

Letitia James, attorney general of New York state, spoke to the crowd at Rochester's Juneteenth event on Saturday.

“Our fundamental freedom is at risk” right now in this country, James told the crowd. “And we're not going back. And so we've got to remember, this November, remember what they died for. Remember all the day did for our freedom and recognize that the power my friends lies in our hands. So let us march on to freedom and to progress and to refuse to go back. God bless you.”

What is Juneteenth?

When President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863, to free enslaved African Americans, it took time for word to spread.

And even though the Emancipation Proclamation was made effective, it could not be enforced in seces-



Kayshawna Evans and Melanie Funchess prepare to take a photo and GIF at the Hype booth sponsored by the Eastman Museum at the Rochester 2024 Juneteenth Festival.
 PHOTOS BY WILLIAM RAMSEY/ DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

sionist states still under Confederate control, according to the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

It wasn't until more than two years later on June 19, 1865 — five months after Congress passed the 13th Amendment, which would be ratified at year's end — that Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas, with 2,000 Union troops to proclaim that more than 250,000 enslaved Black people in the state were free.

Although some local slave owners initially ignored the directive, Granger demanded that they comply with the proclamation.

Serious conversation, education

Kayshawna Evans and Melanie Funchess decided to get a photo and a GIF made at the “Hype Booth,” where people could take, then share online, a cool photo and clip of themselves. It was sponsored by the George Eastman Museum.

The women spoke and hugged afterward. Both were celebrating educational milestones — a graduation for one and a return to education for the other.

Real life topics were woven into the fabric of the day. This was not just a music festival or a food truck rodeo or a celebration of early summer.

Samuel Dennis and Laticia Jones live in public housing downtown. They came over because it was free, it was culture and because they wanted to learn



Samuel Dennis and Laticia Jones came over to the MLK Park on Saturday for the festival to learn and have fun.

about Rochester opportunities.

They are working on their credit scores and finances now with the hope later of becoming homebuyers.

“You got to educate yourself first, you know what I mean?” Dennis said. They were drinking it all in.

And Juneteenth means something important to them.

— *USA TODAY* contributed information for this article.