



# Contra Costa County Humanitarians Of Year Named At MLK Event

"These honorees exemplify the social justice and community commitment values championed by Dr. King," said Supervisor John Gioia.

By [Maggie Avants](#), Patch Staff | Jan 24, 2019 6:29 pm ET | Updated Jan 24, 2019 7:13 pm ET



MARTINEZ, CA — The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors Tuesday named a Richmond preacher who's been active in preventing violence and reducing the city's homicide rates as Humanitarian of the Year during the 41st Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration in Martinez.

Rev. Donnell Jones, pastor of New Direction Ministries, has been serving the Contra Costa County community for more than 25 years. He is currently serving as a consultant

for the Richmond Police Department working on issues like violence prevention, immigration, education and economic development.

Jones also opened the New Soul Cafe, at 1305 Carlson Blvd., in Richmond last year.

He addressed the crowd after receiving his award, thanking the board for their recognition and telling the crowd of more than 100 onlookers that, "the struggle is real, and we are in it."

"It's not easy to stand on the corner and watch boys with bullets in them lose their last breath," Jones said.



Reverend Donnell Jones, pastor of New Direction Ministries, is Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors' 2019 Humanitarian of the Year (Photo credit: Contra Costa County)

"It's not easy to talk to mothers who hate, who just hate, the community and it's current situation," he said. "It's not easy to stand and tell somebody it's going to be alright when they've lost their only child.

"And so we come together today to say thank you Contra Costa County, for allowing us to be in the struggle, and acknowledging the work that we've done," Jones said.

Also honored Tuesday was Pinole Valley High School senior Yassna Ahmadi, who was selected by the board of supervisors as Student Humanitarian of the Year.

"These honorees exemplify the social justice and community commitment values championed by Dr. King," said Board Chair, Supervisor John Gioia.

Ahmadi, an honors student and president of the student body, was chosen for her passionate leadership and the impact she has already made during her high school career.

As the lead writer for the school newspaper, Spartan Ink, Ahmadi has written over a dozen articles on topics addressing real-world concerns — from immigration to LGBTQ issues to women's rights.



Yassna Ahmadi (pictured) a senior at Pinole Valley High School, is the winner of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors' 2019 Student Humanitarian Award. (Photo credit: Contra Costa County)

She also organized and spoke at the school's Parkland memorial ceremony.

Among her many activities, she also works as a babysitter and a volunteer assistant to a UC Berkeley professor.

She is an activist who "has a great sense of respect toward her peers and adults," said Ahmadi's school principal, with her dedication to others described as an embodiment of the spirit and legacy of Dr. King.

Tuesday's celebration, titled "the Dream Starts with Me," also featured a keynote speaker: Sheryl Lane, executive director of Richmond nonprofit Building Blocks for Kids. Lane, who grew up in the segregated South and moved to California for greater opportunity, shared her perspective on Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy.

The event was accompanied by a live band as well as the Los Medanos College Gospel Choir.

A group of students from the Contra Costa School of Performing Arts recited "For My People," a poem by Margaret Walker.

*Bay City News Service contributed to this report.*

*Photo credit: Contra Costa County*