

Cityside

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NATHAN GOOTEE, 14, does an arm stand in the hip-hop presentation Friday at the Peace Camp celebration.

Peace Camp teaches teens how to walk a positive path

■ Creative arts help students develop skills in justice and leadership

By **Kamika Dunlap**
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OAKLAND

THIS summer, students in Kevin Akhidenor's lyricism class learned the difference between what he calls "real life gangsters" and "rap stuff."

His class is one of many taught at Oakland Peace Camp 2005, which more than 80 middle and high school students from around the city attended this summer.

"Real gangsters don't last," said Akhidenor, a 21-year-old camp youth teacher. "They go to jail or die in the end."

A creative arts and non-violence educa-

tion program, the Peace Camp ended Friday with a celebration ceremony at Fruitvale's Cesar Chavez Education Center gymnasium. The two-week long session is designed to provide a safe and fun environment for youngsters in the summer. Students study peace and justice through art workshops and learn how to build leadership skills. The goal is to inspire community activism instead of violence.

"The kids are clear that the peace camp is a place of positive vibes, and we are going to push them to work hard and be creative," said Peace Camp director Mike Siegel.

"Through my teaching experience in public schools it became clear to me that I have tremendous respect for Oakland youth and want to give them a chance to shine and

Please see **PEACE**, Local

"I have tremendous respect for Oakland youth and want to give them a chance to shine and excel."

Mike Siegel
PEACE CAMP DIRECTOR





RAY CHAVEZ — Staff photos

DAVID MONTES, (above) a community supporter, describes a mural called "Power and Justice" at the Peace Camp artwork presentation Friday at Fruitvale's Cesar Chavez Educational Center. Haddim Sow, 10, (top) spins around during a hip-hop presentation.

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THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE

Peace camp a place of positive vibes for area youth

► PEACE, from Local 1

excel."

Oakland Leaf, a non-profit education organization, sponsored the camp. It was founded in 2003, in the midst of the war in Iraq and a skyrocketing year for homicides in Oakland. That backdrop brought educators and artists together to promote world peace and find alternatives to street violence.

Alvonda Cunningham, 16, enjoyed the hip-hop class at camp and traveled from San Leandro to participate. Typically

she spends her summers sitting at home, baby-sitting or doing nothing, she said.

At the celebration ceremony, students showed off their dance moves. Dressed in white T-shirts and blue jeans they found their groove, some shaking their hips and others spinning on their heads. The kept up with the tunes from the turntable and the beats from the speakers.

"I love it," said Cunningham. "Some of the choreography was really hard but I was able to learn the steps from my

teacher."

Peace Camp Dean Ernest Bagner is a retired Oakland school teacher. He said working in public schools for 28 years taught him how to take a compassionate approach.

"When our students make mistakes, we need to support them and not chastise them," said Bagner. "We need to stop perpetuating violence and to change our hearts."

The late Nate Walrod, a former poetry teacher in Oakland, also advocated creative education programs for youth. In

2002, he was killed in a motorcycle accident, and the camp honors his legacy.

"Nate felt we needed to give the best resources to the youth because they are the most valuable part of our community," said his father, Stephen Walrod, who attended Friday's celebration. "He wanted a program that combined principles of love and peace."

Next year organizers hope to recruit more students and to add another week to the camp. They also plan to take a field trip to Yosemite.