

Arizona to celebrate its first King holiday

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona is set to emerge from two decades of conflict, embarrassment and a boycott championed by Stevie Wonder when it celebrates its first official Martin Luther King Jr. holiday this month.

• Wonder will be on hand and may even sing.

Arizona voters approved the holiday in November, making New Hampshire the only state without a holiday specifically honoring King, although it does celebrate Civil Rights Day on the same day.

"This will be the first time it's a celebration instead of a celebration-protest," said the Rev. Warren Stewart, pastor of the Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix and a longtime King holiday supporter.

The biggest celebrations will be in Phoenix, where thousands were expected to attend a city-sponsored prayer breakfast on Friday.

Wonder was scheduled to attend, along with Rosa Parks, whose refusal to give up her seat and move to the back of the bus triggered a 1955 boycott in Montgomery, Ala.

A march from downtown to the state Capitol on Jan. 18, the date of the holiday this year, also was expected to draw thousands. Rallies, prayer vigils and concerts were planned by cities, churches and schools across Arizona.

Although most of state government will close for the holiday, it will be a work day for lawmakers and their staffs.

But House Speaker Mark Killian, a Republican, said the holiday won't be ignored by legislators. Routine committee hearings will be canceled so members can attend the King Day rally and other events, he said.

Phoenix will hold its King Day breakfast at the downtown America West Arena, the new 20,000-seat arena where the pro basketball Phoenix Suns play.

Rose Newsome of the Phoenix Equal Opportunity Department, which is organizing the event, said more than 500 singers and dancers will perform. Dozens of celebrities and civil rights leaders also were scheduled to attend.

Attorney wants seal on verdict

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A defense attorney in the Rodney King case says he will ask the judge in the civil rights trial of four officers to seal the verdicts, giving police time to prepare for civil unrest.

Ira Salzman, attorney for police Sgt. Stacey Koon, said he would make the request on Wednesday to U.S. District Judge John G. Davies.

"I'm going to ask that if a decision is reached in the case, the verdicts not be unsealed until police officers are on alert," Salzman said.

He said sealing the verdicts could help prevent riots such as those that followed the April acquittal of Koon and three other officers on state brutality charges related to the videotaped beating of King in 1991.

The civil rights charges were filed against the officers after the riots. That trial is scheduled to begin Feb. 2.

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