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***Kaitlin Harris (right), 8 years-old of Richmond, high-fives Boswick the clown during the Richmond Homefront Festival at Lucretia W. Edward Shoreline Park in Richmond, Calif. on Saturday, October 04, 2008. (Dean Coppola/Contra Costa Times)***

## **Three-day festival celebrates city's World War II home front history**

It was an era of firsts.

It was the first time women entered the workforce, building ships and filling in for men fighting in World War II. It was the first time a private company offered health care to workers, recognizing that it was important for them to know they'd be taken care of if they were injured. And it was the first time the government provided child care.

"We had women entering the workforce in huge numbers and most of them had kids," said Joanne Jarvis, a National Park Service ranger as she led residents on a tour along the Richmond waterfront where bustling shipyards operated during the 1940s.

Richmond's rich history took center stage Saturday at the Homefront Festival By the Bay, which celebrates the city's role in the national home front effort during the war. The festival began Friday with the USO Dance and continues today with the Homefront Reunion at 11 a.m.

Locals and out-of-towners alike toured the ship Red Oak Victory, the last remaining ship of the 747 that were built at the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond in the 1940s. They relived

that wartime era through the musical "Rivets," and through artwork that children at the time created, which is displayed at The Cannery building. They followed park rangers on a historical tour along the waterfront.

Richmond officials and history lovers have done more in the past few years to share the story of blacks and women in the home front effort, but it is still new to some.

"I've lived in this area almost all my life and I just didn't know about the history," Berkeley resident Lynn Thomas said. "I had no idea people built ships here during the war."

The war was a turning point in this city's history. Richmond was a small town of about 23,000 whose population ballooned to 100,000 as people from around the country flocked here to work at the Kaiser shipyards during the war. Blacks and women integrated into the workforce, a major juncture in American history.

"The shipyards were going 24/7 with three shifts: swing, day and graveyard," Jarvis said. "It was a lot of people. Movie theaters, grocery stores, child care centers were open 24 hours to accommodate them."

Housing rose near the shipyards — and some of it still stands today — but it was not enough.

Some workers lived in railcars, Jarvis said. Others slept in shifts on rented beds known as "hot beds" because the bed was still warm when one occupant left and the next climbed in.

Except for shipyard No. 3, where buildings still stand, the other shipyards were not meant to be permanent, Jarvis said. And when the war ended, activity at the yards ceased.

Richmond's experience has some similarities to what happened in cities across the nation where residents rolled up their sleeves and pitched in during the war. Hilda Hawley was a "Rosie the Riveter" in Washington state where she and other women built airplanes.

"I was paid 75 cents an hour and later, in 1945, \$1.10 an hour," Hawley said as she stood near the Rosie the Riveter Memorial in Richmond on Saturday.

"They encouraged us to buy bonds."

She hadn't heard of Richmond's home front effort until she received a flier on the festival. She and her daughter, Georganna, met another "Rosie" here who worked in Ohio.

"Everyone had their individual role but they were all part of one united effort," Georganna Hawley said.