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YAC Open Mic Nights Draw Perris Teens

Come as you are. Have a cup of coffee. Strum the guitar or tickle the ivories of a piano. Recite a monologue. Read your own poetry. Call your buddies on stage to sing a duet or ensemble song.

The Perris open mic night invites high-school and college-age students to try their hand at performing before a live audience before a supportive audience.

The brainchild of the City's Youth Advisory Committee, the open mic night program has become so popular in recent months it has been extended through the winter.

"They have taken the idea and ran with it," said Josh Estrada, a City liaison to the Youth Advisory Committee. "They go out, create and post their own flyers announcing the next open mic night and run the show. We're just here to support them."

Open-mic nights take place the first Friday of the month and the Perris Teen Center across from City Hall at 100 North D Street. In addition to the flyers, the YAC committee advertises the festivities on Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and through texts.



Perris Youth Advisory Committee members Alexa Olivas, Gabriella Bulacan, Aasiyah DeAndrade and India Rockett address a crowd of their peers at the Oct. 2 open mic night in the City, which drew more than 50 people.

"We're proud of our Youth Advisory Committee because they came up with this idea on their own and it's proven to be a big hit," said Sara Cortes-de Pavón, who also works with the committee on various projects and programs. "It's something that we as adults would never have thought of, and it's growing in popularity."

Organizers and participants agree open mic night provides an exciting opportunity for aspiring artists.

"This is an opportunity for teens to express themselves in a safe environment," said Alexa Olivas, 16, a member of the Youth Advisory Committee who emceeds open mic night. "People always say there isn't enough for teenagers to do. This is something for them to do. We appreciate the City for allowing us to do this."

Fellow committee member Gabriella Bulacan, 16, said open mic night grew out of a desire by Perris teenagers "looking for a place to hang out and feel comfortable." Topics addressed during each two-hour session range from love, breaking u, teen angst, transitioning to college and the importance of protecting the environment.

"A lot of it is emotional stuff," she said.



Alonya Castillo, 16, belts out a number at the Perris open mic night, which is held the first Friday of every month at the Teen Center.

The most recent open mic night took place Oct. 2 and drew more than 50 teenagers. Among them were Deja Prudhomme, 17, and her friend, Alonya Castillo, 16. Both performed at previous open mic nights; Alonya sang on stage while Deja performed a monologue about overcoming challenges as a teenager and allowing herself the "freedom to be myself."

"I felt really uplifted," Deja said. "It was an adrenalin rush."

Alonya said she had to overcome her natural anxiety about performing before an audience.

"The audience was very supportive," she said. "I felt great."

Alonya sang "Just Like a Star" by Corinne Bailey Rae at the most recent open mic show, again drawing cheers from the crowd.

"I am really pleased there is a place in Perris where teens can express themselves," she said.

Ruben Olivas, 11, was the youngest performer on stage. The Sierra Vista Elementary School sixth-grader has taken part in every open mic night since the program began in June. He performed his own composition, which he labeled "Rain," on his guitar.

"I think I did all right," said Ruben, who is the brother of emcee Alexis Olivas. "I think I could have done better. You can always improve."

Ruben said he finds the open mic show "exhilarating and exciting."

"The people are super nice and very welcoming," he said. "They make you feel like you can do anything."



Ruben Olivas, 11, strums the guitar during the recent open mic night program.

Eric Lopez, 17, told the audience as he stepped on stage that they would hear his first-ever attempt to play the ukulele. He received the instrument just days earlier.

"I'm not very good at this," he said.

Afterwards, he admitted he had a case of jitters but said he would return at an upcoming open mic event.

"I really enjoyed the atmosphere of the place," he said. "I will come back. I've just got to get better."

Perris City workers say they are more than pleased that the youth committee conceived, organized and run the monthly shows. The next one is scheduled for Nov. 6, which will include a potluck in addition to entertainment.

The Youth Advisory Committee is hosting a Halloween Bash at 7 p.m. on Oct. 30 at the Teen Center, 100 North D Street. The free event features a costume contest, music, food and of course, candy.

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