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Benny Villegas to Serve as Veterans Day Parade Grand Marshal

Perris native Benny Villegas never misses an opportunity to promote the City he loves.

Villegas, a fifth-generation Perris resident, will serve as grand marshal of the annual Veterans Day Parade on Nov. 7, the latest in a lifelong string of accolades earned from his support of the City.

The parade, which begins at 10 a.m. from Fourth and D streets and ends at Perris City Hall at San Jacinto Avenue and D Street, features marching bands, color and honor guards, military vehicles, classic cars and floats. Trophies will be presented to the best parade entries and there is no charge to enter.

Free handheld flags and Veterans Day t-shirts will go to the first 150 parade spectators.

Villegas, 71, said he is “humbled and overwhelmed” by his choice as grand marshal.

The honor marks the third time this year that the family—which relocated to Perris in 1924—has been recognized for its contribution to Perris. In January, the Villegas’ were named pioneer family of the year, an event that drew 150 sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, children and grandchildren to a ceremony at the Perris Depot on Fourth Street.

In June, the family was honored for its contributions to Perris Valley agribusiness as part of the annual Rods & Rails and Potato Festival.

“This is like winning the lottery,” Villegas said. “As a veteran, it means a lot to me. The freedom we enjoy today stands upon the shoulders of our veterans. I’m proud to represent my family and all the Villegases who have served and all the men and women in uniform who continue to serve today.”



Vietnam Veteran Benny Villegas, pictured here in front of a soldier’s memorial in Perris, will serve as grand marshal of the Nov. 7 Veterans Day Parade.

Villegas relatives who have served with distinction include Ysmael “Smiley” Villegas, a World War II Medal of Honor recipient who was the first veteran interred at Riverside National Cemetery.

Another cousin, Manuel Villegas, earned three Silver Star medals for gallantry for his World War II service. Numerous other relatives served honorably.

Benny Villegas served two years in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War as a member of the signal corps, including deployments to Vietnam, Korea, Cambodia and Thailand.

“I was proud to wear the uniform of the United States military and proud to serve my country,” he said.

Villegas’ other community activities over the years have included helping organize and serving as chairman of the City’s Cinco de Mayo Parade from 1968 to 1975 and coaching and umpiring youth baseball games for more than a decade. Villegas also has worked with students in the 4-H and Future Farmers of America programs. He has served as logistics chairman for the City’s annual Relay for Life program and is active with the Knights of Columbus at St. James Catholic Church. He is an ambassador for the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Villegas has been married to his wife, Debbie, for 45 years.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, a Navy veteran, said the City is proud of its military heritage and the commitment of its residents to serve.

Perris Valley residents served in the military long before the City was incorporated in 1911 and are on the front lines in conflict zones across the globe. Thirteen Civil War veterans are buried in the Perris Valley Cemetery on Perris Boulevard.

“Our Veterans Day Parade is a symbol of how much we value the service of all of our veterans—those from past wars to those serving in harm’s way today,” Busch said.

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