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## Community Pride Shines in Annual Holiday Parade

More than 2,500 people enjoyed brilliant sunshine, holiday music, marching bands, classic cars and the appearance of an endangered Asian elephant during the 26th annual City of Perris Christmas Parade on Dec. 13.

Crowds of spectators—sometimes seven or eight-deep—lined historic D Street as the parade made its way from Mercado Park to Perris City Hall.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers, City Council members Tonya Burke, David Rabb and Julio Rodriguez and City Clerk Nancy Salazar rode in classic cars along the route, as did Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley and Police Chief Mike Judge.

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The Perris Youth Advisory Committee shows their marching skill.

Prior to the parade, Mayor Busch predicted clear skies for the event despite rain showers that fell the night before the big show.

"We said nobody was going to rain on our parade and no one did!" he said. "The sun has come out, our City has come out and we're going to have another great holiday celebration."



Local elementary school students on the march.

The theme of this year's holiday parade was "Live Well Christmas." The theme continues the City's Live Well Perris healthy-eating active-living lifestyle campaign which has attracted thousands of residents to a variety of activities in the past year.

City officials are encouraging residents to eat healthy and exercise during this year's holidays.

"Living well is something our City has committed to for a long time," Busch said. "We're really proud of our City's commitment and we're proud of our community's commitment by coming out to the events that we sponsor."



Tai, the elephant, poses with Mayor Busch before kicking-off the Annual Christmas parade.

As she has for many years, Tai, a 46-year-old Asian elephant, took her place at the head of the parade. She was accompanied by trainer Gary Johnson from Have Trunk Will Travel, an elephant rescue center. Johnson said Tai, who checks in at 9-feet tall and weighs 8,000-pounds, has appeared in commercials and movies, including "Operation Dumbo Drop," "Larger Than Life" and "Water for Elephants." He said Tai can respond to 75 voice commands. Johnson said elephants were domesticated more than 4,000 years ago—even before horses.

"We love coming to the Perris Christmas parade," Johnson said. "It's a great event with a great history,"



Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rodgers riding in the parade.

Marching bands from Perris, Moreno Valley, Riverside, the Coachella Valley and Los Angeles County all put in appearances at this year's parade. They played a variety of holiday carols that drew cheers from the crowd gathered along the parade route.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers said she enjoys the marching bands, the music, the celebration and the pageantry that always accompanies a Perris Christmas parade.

"It's a great way to kick off the Christmas season," Rogers said. "I am looking forward to seeing all the youth bands—and all the other participants—who are taking part in this great parade."



Newly elected City Councilmember Tonya Burke waves to the crowd.

Newly elected City Councilman David Rabb recalled seeing his first Perris Christmas Parade when he was two or three years old.

"Events like this parade show that we are committed to making the City of Perris as good as it can be for our residents and visitors," he said. "It's a great opportunity to show off Perris to the rest of Southern California."



Councilmembers Julio Rodriguez and David Rabb pose with a winning group.

New City Council woman Tonya Burke praised the City for providing the resources to stage an annual Christmas parade.

"A lot of cities don't have the resources or commitment to continue traditions like this," she said. "I am elated. I am so happy Mayor Busch was able to predict that no rain would fall on us. It's a beautiful day. It's a wonderful event. I am looking forward to many more."

City Councilman Julio Rodriguez stepped out of the car he was riding in to greet onlookers and toss handfuls of candy to eager kids, who enthusiastically scooped them up.

"I am really excited to be here," he said. "It's always a privilege for me to take part in this parade. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

The California Military Institute in Perris sent 150 cadets to take part in the parade. Mariah Leon, 14, played flute on selections that included "Feliz Navidad." She's been playing in the school band for two years.

"I get to play music I know and like," Mariah said. "It makes me feel special."

Her mom, Alma Leon, beamed as a member of the crowd of onlookers.

"I love being part of the City of Perris," she said. "I feel proud to be a part of their Christmas parade."

Regimental band commander Sam Arda, 15, said playing in events like the Christmas Parade solidifies CMI's relationship with the Perris community. Sam plays the flute and his duties as commander put him in charge of the band under the direction of Michael Tatum.

"We are able to show our school spirit to the community," he said. "That's very important. It shows they we are interested in helping the community."



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