



## Walkers Delve into Perris History

Like lots of Perris residents, Susie Sanchez often drove past the City's historic buildings—the City Hall complex, the Perris Theatre, Depot Building, Bank and Southern Hotel—without knowing what made them special.

Until Oct. 19.

Sanchez was one of more than 50 people who took part in a history walk down D Street, a stroll that combined a low-intensity workout and a tutorial on the City's past.

For Sanchez, the history walk proved to be a family affair. She brought her daughter and six grandchildren, ages 1 to 10.

"It's very nice to learn a lot about the history here," Sanchez said. "I see the buildings but I never knew their history or significance. The grandchildren were all born in Perris and I wanted them to learn about their City too. Now we have."

The walkers included some long-time Perris residents who have seen the community evolve over decades as well as young families, moms and dads pushing strollers and new residents wanting to learn a little more about the place they call home.

The history walk continues the City's "Live Well Perris" healthy eating active living initiative, which was geared at getting residents off their couches and working up a little sweat.

The Live Well Perris program was so well received that the City created a series of winter workouts that run through Nov. 23. The next workout takes place at 9 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 23, at Mercado Park, 10th and D Streets. City officials have committed to continue the Live Well Perris in 2014 and have begun preliminary planning.

The one-mile walk down D Street shed light on one of Perris' greatest attributes—the City's fine collection of 19th and early 20th Century buildings. The walk began at the City Council Chambers, formerly part of the Perris High School Campus dating back almost 100 years. The chambers once served as a study hall. In 1932, half the high-school burned and was never rebuilt. Eventually the campus was moved to its current location at Nuevo Road and Perris Boulevard. For years, the council chambers served as headquarters for the Perris Police Department, then were vacated and fell into major disrepair. When the City decided to renovate the building about a decade ago, scorch marks from the 1932 fire remained visible.

The building was turned into a one-of-kind meeting room that retains its original charm and character, said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, who gave an impromptu talk about the council chamber restoration.

"We are very proud of our efforts to save this building and to preserve other historically significant buildings," Busch said. "We think it's one of the things that make Perris unique in Southern California."

Just down the street from the City Council Chambers, the walkers took in the Perris Theatre. Tour guide Midgie Parker said the original theatre was an open-air venue. The present building dates from 1946 and long-range plans call for its conversion to a multi-use entertainment complex.

At the 1892 Depot Building, the group visited the Perris Valley Historical Museum, which traces the growth and development of the Perris Valley from the time gold was discovered in the Good Hope Mine in the mid-1800s through the era as an agricultural hub to the development of a modern City.

At the Bank of Perris, the great-granddaughter of Fred T. Perris, the railroad engineer who the City is named after, told about some of the historic deeds, photographs, high-school yearbooks and other treasures being compiled into a municipal archive.

"Look around," said Christina Perris, the City's archivist. "Appreciate what Perris has!"

John and Ann Motte awaited the walking tour at the 1886 Southern Hotel, which their family has restored. The hotel opened to serve the needs of miners and travelers in the region. The hotel was built and operated by Swiss immigrants Bernardo and Marcellina Bernasconi. Following the restoration by the Motte family, the Southern Hotel now appears on the National Registrar of Historical Places.

While the walk emphasized the significance of D Street in the growth and development of historical Perris, modern development also was given kudos. The walk included information about the Perris Station Apartments under construction for senior citizens and ended in Mercado Park, home of the continuing Farmers Market.

Resident David Munoz came away impressed.

"It helps to know the history and the strong roots of all the divergent people who make up Perris," he said. "It makes me feel like I live in a forward-thinking and progressive City."

City elected officials also smiled at the walk's success. Mayor Busch said the City is eager to show off its past.

"Our City has been dedicated to preserve our history for years," he said. "A lot of people know Perris as rail center for Southern California and this walk has highlighted some of our other historical venues. It's important to tell the story that we have been here for a long time."

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough and City Councilman Julio Rodriguez also attended the history walk.

"It's nice to be able to walk through a real Downtown area that has been preserved," Yarbrough said. "Most cities have lost that. We've been able to preserve it. The City has done a nice job keeping its history alive."

Rodriguez said the history walk "fuses the past with the present so we can look forward to the future."

"It's great to be able to talk about the history of our City and introduce our residents to its great history," he said.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch (wearing cap) leads a group of walkers into the Bank of Perris municipal archives on Oct. 19, part of a stroll down historic D Street.



John Motte explains the history of the Southern Hotel, which his family restored, during a stop at the 1886 location as part of the City of Perris' history walk on Oct. 19.



Christina Perris, great-granddaughter of Fred T. Perris, who the City is named after, details some of the artifacts on display at the Bank of Perris, which serves as a repository for City history.