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Perris Talent Shines at Tree Lighting

The air was chilly but nothing could dampen the spirit of the season during the City of Perris' 26th annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony Dec. 6.

An overflowing crowd gathered at Perris City Hall to hear musical selections from chorus group and dance teams from Perris-area schools and churches in nearby communities. Each of the 700 seats set up for the pageantry was filled and at least that number of people stood around the stage to see the show.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilman Julio Rodriguez kicked the evening off when they lighted the official Christmas tree at City Hall. Busch and Rodriguez led the crowd in counting down from 10 to zero, then threw the switch that lighted the tree to the cheers of the enthusiastic throng.

"Ho-ho-ho, we've got a great evening for a tree-lighting," Busch said. "This is a great event that keeps getting bigger and better every year. The kids come out and enjoy it. It gives them a sense of the season and it's just a lot of fun. The City is delighted to put this event on every year."

Rodriguez said he is pleased to continue a Perris tradition.

"It's great to be part of a celebration that our community likes and looks forward to," he said. "This event brings together the City, schools and families for an awesome event. It shows our continuing commitment to our residents."

The evening's entertainment included performances from 16 school and church groups, including chorale singing, folklorico and hip-hop dancing and bands. Nearly 50 students from Rob Reiner Pre-school in Perris entertained the crowd with their renditions of Feliz Navidad and Ha-Ha-Ha Holidays.

Teacher Delia Garcia said the youngsters practiced their numbers for three weeks.

"We're very excited to sing and we're going to sing our very best because Santa is watching," she said. "He needs to know we're doing a good job so he can reward for our singing!"

Manuel Rico, 4, said he was happy to entertain the many Perris residents who turned out. The reason: "My mom is here to see us sing."

Classmate McKenna Crater, 4, offered another reason for performing: "I just want to sing."

Josiah Chasteen, band director at Innovative Horizons Charter School, said that after years of cutbacks in music-related activities due to the state budget crunch, some classes are being restored. He was glad to lead his 40 sixth-through-eighth graders to the stage to perform.

"The cuts are starting to be restored," Chasteen said. "I am happy to be part of the rebirth of school music in Perris."

The Rays of Sunshine from the Church of God in Banning augmented their performance by waving dozens of flags representing countries around the world. It was their tribute to the universality of the Christmas spirit.

"We all love coming to Perris," said group leader Belen Duran-Reyes. "It's such a welcoming community. We love to come here to sing and make people happy."

In addition to the concert performances, the Tree Lighting Ceremony was highlighted by the appearance of Santa Claus himself, who arrived in a one-horse open sleigh and posed for photographs with dozens of children and families.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilman Julio Rodriguez lead the countdown that ended with the lighting of the City's official Christmas tree, an event that drew 1,400 people.



Flutists Emma Avila, Rosemary Zelaya and Philip Romero perform during the annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony at Perris City Hall.



Colorful folklorico dancers added to the pageantry of the 26th annual Christmas Tree Lighting in the City of Perris.



California Military Institute band leader Michael Tatum leads the orchestra that closed the night of music at the annual City of Perris annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony.