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Christmas Parade Combines Health and Holidays

Holidays and health were the twin themes of the City of Perris' annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 14.

The 2013 Christmas parade featured more than 100 marching bands, color guards, classic cars, floats, dance groups and equestrian units taking their turn marching down D Street to City Hall while 2,000 spectators lined the route.

It also featured a group of City residents who finished up the last of a series of winter workouts as part of the Live Well Perris healthy eating active living initiative. They carried a banner announcing the continuation of the Live Well Perris program, which carries the theme "A New You in 2014." Workouts for the upcoming year begin on Jan. 11 at Mercado Park, at which time the initial weigh-in takes place for the City's version of the Biggest Loser weight-shedding competition.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough pulled double duty on parade day. First, he completed an hour workout at Mercado Park, then changed clothes and drove a classic car in the parade.

"What a glorious day," Yarbrough said. "The Winter Workouts are a great way to keep in shape for the holidays and the best news is, we will continue them in 2014. As for the parade, it's one of our signature events in this City—truly a time for family and friends to come together to share the spirit of the holidays."

The Perris Christmas parade usually features the appearance of one elephant from Have Trunk Will Travel, a refuge in the City. This year the parade boasted a pair of Asian elephants—Tai, 45, a native of Thailand who checks in at 9,000 pounds and Dixie, 47, the smaller of the duo. The Indian elephant weighs just 8,000-pounds. Both are 9-feet tall.

Gary Johnson of Have Trunk Will Travel said Asian elephants have smaller ears than their African counterparts. Like African elephants, they also are an endangered species.

"We've lived in Perris 23 years and we love it," Johnson said. "It's great to get out and show the elephants off. The people in Perris are very warm and they sure like the elephants!"

Daisy and Tai led the parade. Both performed a series of tricks to the delight of the throngs of spectators lining the route. Mayor Daryl Busch took a photo with the pachyderms.

"This is a great day for a parade," he said. "The City has been sponsoring this event for decades. I enjoy it, the community enjoys it. Everybody enjoys it."

Perris City Councilman Al Landers served as parade announcer in 2013, marking his 14th year as the man behind the microphone, announcing each of the parade's participants.

"The good Lord has smiled on the City of Perris today with this beautiful sunshiny day," Landers said. "This event means a lot to our City. It brings together our wonderfully diverse community for a common cause—to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. I am proud to be part of a City that continually gives back to its residents."

City Councilman Julio Rodriguez and City Councilwoman Rita Rogers also rode in the parade. They were joined by City Clerk Nancy Salazar, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, State Assemblyman Jose Medina, (D-Riverside) and U.S. Rep. Mark Takano (D-Riverside.)

"I am super-excited to be part of this parade," Rodriguez said. "It's one of our biggest events of the year and one that is a true community event. It's great for everyone, from the young to the young at heart!"

Rogers said the Christmas Parade brings together churches, schools, civic groups, volunteers, business owners and residents.

"It's wonderful to see," she said. "Everyone is coming to the City of Perris. That makes me feel great."

This year marked the first time for Salazar to attend as City Clerk. She came along with her daughters Alina, 15, and Khloe, 3, and husband, Cesar.

"It's all about family and friends," she said as she waved to the crowd.

Families lined the parade route to take in the pageantry. Marching bands pumped out holiday carols. There were hip-hop and Hawaiian dancers. Colorful floats depicting religious figures and holiday characters motored past. Low-rider vehicles bounced up and down on the pavement.

Jon and Racheal Aldridge waited to see their 13-year-old son, Jordan, march by as part of the Lakeside Middle School band, where he plays trumpet. They brought their other children to see the parade as well. Those included Jaden, 5, Jayla, 4, and Jon Jr., 2.

"This is fun!" said Racheal Aldridge. "It's nice to bring the kids out, it's nice seeing all the bands, the cars and the elephants. Jon Aldridge echoed those sentiments.

"It's beautiful to see all the families supporting the City of Perris," he said. "Perris is a great place to live and raise a family."



Marina Vazquez, 16, wears a cap that says she's been naughty as she marches with the Heritage High School band in the annual City of Perris Christmas Parade.



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough completes a push-up during an early-morning workout that took place prior to the start of the Dec. 14 Christmas Parade.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and Gary Johnson, of Have Trunk Will Travel elephant refuge in the City, discuss the two biggest participants in the 2013 parade—Asian elephants Dixie and Tai.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Council members Rita Rogers and Al Landers present a gift basket to parade grand marshal Cheryl Ziska.



Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez shares a laugh with City Clerk Nancy Salazar and her husband, Cesar, during the annual City of Perris Christmas Parade.