



Perris Press Release

Contact: Joe Vargo, Perris Public Information Officer
Phone: 951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Centennial Celebration Begins With Annual Fred T. Perris Day

A crowd estimated at 1,000 came to the annual Fred T. Perris Day celebration on Saturday to remember an honor an immigrant family who came to the community more than 100 years ago and through hard work and thrift wove themselves deeply into the fabric of the City.

The crowd included more than 150 grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great great-grandchildren and great great great-grandchildren of Petronilo and Susana Mora, who were honored as the Perris Pioneer Family for 2011. The event, held at the refurbished Train Depot building, took on added significance this year as it kicked off 12 months of celebrations and special activities to coincide with Perris' 100th birthday.

"What a great event," said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, who presented the Mora family with a proclamation enumerating their contributions to Perris. "Events like this help keep alive the history of Perris and the Perris Valley. I am very pleased that this important event begins a year of celebrating the City's centennial."

Tragedy forced Petronilo and Susana Mora to leave their prosperous home in Mexico in 1907 and settle in Perris.

One of the couple's eight sons—they had nine children in all—accidentally shot and killed an acquaintance. Fearing retribution, the family headed north, first to Texas and then to the Perris Valley, drawn by reports of a thriving agricultural and livestock economy. They began working in the alfalfa and hay fields and soon expanded to providing fertilizer to the citrus industry in Riverside. Over the years, the family owned restaurants, a barber shop, assisted in the feeding of local farm workers and became very active in St. James Catholic Church.

Dozens of Mora descendants still call the Perris Valley home. Others came in from San Diego, Orange and San Bernardino counties.

Several members of the Mora family spoke about life in the early days, when the family settled in and around Perris. Mora family members a century ago made goat cheese, took part in exhibition boxing matches at the then open-air Perris Theatre, packed sacks of grain for rail transport and picked onions to earn a living. Travel in those days wasn't always safe. One early Mora descendant, who lived west of the City, packed up her children and shotgun as she rode her wagon to Perris twice a week for provisions.

Vincent Magana, a grandson of the Mora pioneers, recalls packing sacks of wheat, oats and barley as a teen-ager. He worked from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and earned \$5.80 per day—good wages for the 1940s. For fun, he and his friends drove to Riverside to visit Mount Rubidoux and grab a cherry Coke and French fries at the local drive-in.

"I looked forward to going to school every day," he said. "School was where the action was. Perris was a great town to grow up in. I am so grateful at having been raised here."

Dora Arnold, who accepted the plaque honoring the family, said simply: "I am proud to have grown up in Perris and I thank the City for giving our family this honor."

The day's events included folklorico dancing from several young Perris residents, face painting, pony rides and a mural depicting the City's past and historical landmarks. The 6-foot by 12-foot canvas mural was designed by Perris artist Rob Padilla and dozens of youngsters took time to paint a portion of it on Saturday. The day also included artwork from Perris school students. A double-decker bus gave hundreds of residents a tour of the City's historic downtown, including the Theatre, Bank of Perris Building, Southern Hotel and several Victorian-era homes.

In addition to Mayor Busch, Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, City Manager Richard Belmudez, Assistant City Manager Ron Carr, Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin, Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager Michael McDermott and Human Resources and Risk Manager Isabel Lugo headed up the team of City staff at the event.

McDermott said the City has centennial events planned for each month in 2011. He said he could not have been more pleased with the results.

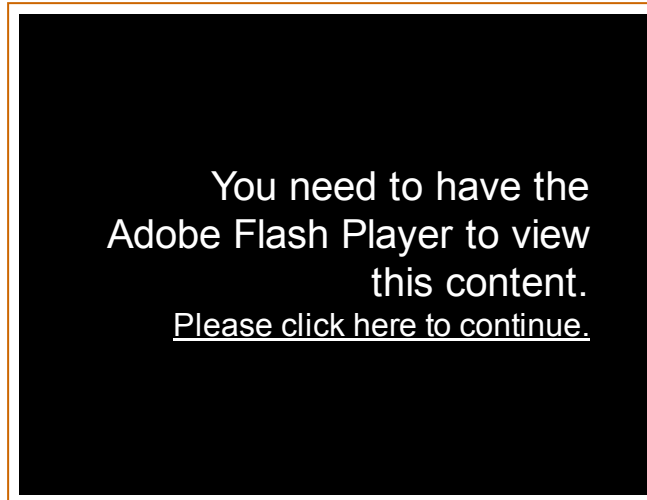
"This is always a great event in and of itself every year," McDermott said of Fred T. Perris Day. "When you mix it in with the City centennial, it becomes even bigger."

The City worked with the Perris Valley Historical and Museum Association to plan Fred T. Perris Day. Local historian Katie Keyes said the Mora family was selected as this year's Pioneer Family because their ties to Perris go back to before the City was incorporated on May 26, 1911.

"The Mora family was present at the creation of Perris," Keyes said. "We are very excited about this event and it has been delightful talking to all the family members and learning about their history. This helps keep history alive for future generations."

Councilman Yarbrough extended a special thanks to the Mora family, Perris residents, City staff and visitors who took part in the beginning of a year of celebrations to honor the City Centennial.

"We continue to acknowledge and honor our heritage and history," he said. "That says a lot about this community. This celebration has given the City of Perris a beautiful day, a great event and wonderful memories."



Perris mayor Daryl Busch reads a proclamation celebrating the Pioneer Mora family. Standing next to the Mayor are family descendants Juanita Cortez Lee and Dora Arnold and Barry Busch, who represented Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley.



These folklorico dancers added color and verve to the annual Fred T. Perris Day celebration.



This double-decker bus took visitors on a tour of Perris historical landmarks.



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough talks with Planning Commissioner Dave Stuart and Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin.