



Perris Press Release

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Chili Cook-off Thrills Tastebuds and Raises Funds for Charity

Classic cars and hot chili topped the highlights at Perris American Legion Post 575's 10th Annual Chili Cook-off, an event that celebrated the City's approaching 100th birthday, drew hundreds of people and helped raise money for several good causes.

Twenty-two chili cookers from throughout the western U.S. rolled in for the event, as did 30 classic hot rods, muscle cars, convertibles and coupes.

"What a great event!" said Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans, who also is a member of Post 575. "The camaraderie is great.

There are people we only see one time a year—at this chili cook-off. Chili cookers are a special breed. They are a great, great group of people."

The City of Perris teamed up with the American Legion to host the chili cook-off. The City provided pony rides and a jumper for the kids along with several staff members, who handed out goody bags that included aprons, pins and cloth grocery bags, all highlighting the City's Centennial May 26.

Perris was well represented by its elected officials, who arrived throughout the course of the day-long event. Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilman Mark Yarbrough joined Evans, along with City Clerk Judy Haughney.

"This is an annual event that keeps getting bigger and bigger," Busch said. "The American Legion uses it as a fund-raiser and are using it as another venue to highlight our Centennial. The City is involved to show that it is a good neighbor, which is what we should be."

Yarbrough said the chili cook-off is one of the larger annual events taking place at Post 575.

"It's a great community event," he said. "It's good for the post and it's good for the City."

Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez led a contingent of staff and volunteers, which also included Public Safety Commissioner Shawn Haughney, Senior Center Coordinator Erica Tello and Community Services Manager Walt Carter.

The Perris chili cook-off, dubbed Chili & Rods, is part of a regional contest. The winner of the event will head off to Manchester, New Hampshire, for the International Chili Society's world championships in October.

Jim Beaty, of Bakersfield, won the World Championship in 1986 and has appeared at the championships 26 times. He said chili cookers come from all walks of life—doctors, lawyers, plumbers, homemakers, construction workers and professionals. They all share the same passion—making the meanest bowl of chili they can.

"They are passionate about chili," Beaty says. "I enjoy coming down to Perris. The crowd and the people are always very friendly."

Like other chili cookers, Beaty doesn't divulge all the spices that make up his special recipe. He uses beef tri-tip—the standard meat for red chili—and pork sirloin for chili verde.

"It's all meat and sauce," he said.

The competition included several husband-and-wife teams.

Fred and Patti Summers drove six hours from Beatty, Nev., to get to Perris.

The couple, both members of American Legion Post 575, said they started the chili cook-off at the post 10 years ago because they wanted to create a high-profile event for Perris. They said they worked supporting the cook-off for several years but 2011 marked the first time they actually got the chance to cook.

"This event has raised a lot of money for charity," Fred Summers said. "It's a really great thing."

Money raised at Saturday's cook-off and car show will help cover the costs of children and youth activities sponsored by the American Legion.

Armando and Patricia Sanchez, of Westminster, also competed separately. He calls himself the Chili Knight, while she is known as Lady Trish. But the couple spoke in unison about their love of coming to Perris to compete.

"We love to come here," Armando Sanchez said. "You meet different folks, you get a chance to visit a neighboring town and you get to visit with the other competitors."

Patricia Sanchez echoed those sentiments.

"This is a fun cook-off," she said. "The people are great."

While the cooks concentrated on chili, folks like James Cameron, of Norco, were glad to talk about the classic cars they brought to Perris. Cameron came to Post 575 with a 1948 Chevy Fleetmaster police cruiser, which he purchased from eBay.

The car featured a three-speed transmission, disc brakes and rack-and-pinion steering. There was also a rack near the driver's seat that held either a shotgun or submachine gun.

Cameron's car also came with the original siren and flashing red light.

Cameron said he supports events like the chili cook-off/car show because they bring together civic-minded residents determined to make a difference in their communities. He belongs to a car club that helped rehabilitate historic Evergreen Cemetery in Riverside.

"Perris is a nice friendly community," Cameron said.

At the end of a long day of cooking and tasting chili, a panel of judges announced the overall winner. Charlie Blossfield, of

"Fired-up Chili," took top honors. A former competitor in the world championships, Blossfield will participate in the 2011 championships in New Hampshire in the fall.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch prepares to sample a batch of chili during Saturday's 10th annual "Chili & Rods" festival at American Legion Post 575.



A batch of red chili simmers at the big chili-cookoff.



Fred and Patti Summers drove down from Nevada to take part in the American Legion event.



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough and City Manager Richard Belmudez share a laugh during the chili cook-off.



Perris City Clerk Judy Haughney, Community Services Manager Walter Carter, Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans, Senior Center Coordinator Erica Tello and Public Safety Commissioner Shawn Haughney represented the City at the big event.