



home > city hall > press releases

1st Annual Jingle Mingle Event



Dr. Grace Williams, the City of Perris Planning and Economic Development Director, chats with folks who entered an ugly-sweater contest as part of the "Jingle Mingle" gathering Dec. 19 at the Perris Senior Center. The event, hosted by the City, attracted residents, business owners and non-profit agencies.

Perris administrators and elected officials met with current and prospective business owners, members of non-profit agencies and representatives from three Chambers of Commerce to update them on the City's economic progress and pledge support for job-generators in 2018 and beyond.

The first annual "Jingle Mingle" also introduced Dr. Grace Williams as Perris' new Director of Planning and Economic Development.

Williams recently left the March Joint Powers Authority—where she oversaw massive and successful commercial and industrial redevelopment of portions of the former March Air Force Base—to helm the City's immediate and long-term economic strategy.

Other members of the City's economic development team attended the meet-and-greet, including Assistant City Manager Clara Miramontes, Planning Manager Kenneth Phung, Associate Planners Nathan Perez, Diane Sbardellati and Brian Muhu and Principal Management Analyst Michele Ogawa.

City Manager Richard Belmudez addressed the crowd of about 50 who gathered in the Senior Center Dec. 19 for the Jingle Mingle. He said Williams will serve as "the voice of the business community" at City Hall.

"Our mission is to attract new businesses to Perris and retain the ones we have," he said.

Great expectations

Williams said big things are in store for Perris in 2018.

"It's going to be an incredible year," she said. "A lot of amazing things are coming to Perris."

New businesses expected in the upcoming year include sit-down restaurants, skilled manufacturing plants, home-based companies, additional retail shops and "solo-preneurs"—individuals operating by themselves.

The City also is expected to benefit as the cannabis industry continues to develop in Perris in 2018 and beyond. The City Council is scheduled in January to consider a variety of options for the manufacturing, cultivation, testing, distribution and dispensing of cannabis.

Williams spent 20 years as a regional and environmental planner, including 11 at the March Joint Powers Authority. She developed and managed complex regional planning projects, economic development programs and challenging multi-jurisdictional public infrastructure projects that attracted over \$22 million worth of public funds to the March area.



Principal Management Analyst Michele Ogawa listens to two business owners chat during the Dec. 19 Jingle Mingle.

She said one of her greatest strengths is her ability "to forge partnerships that help streamline projects and expedite the implementation of needed improvements and programs for communities."

Williams served in the Army from 2003-11 and earned her doctorate from USC. She has volunteered working with homeless families and serving as a mentor to at-risk in Los Angeles. Williams has two children, Gabriella, 12, and Donny, 14, and the family is buying a home in Perris where they are "eager to grow and be active members of the community," she said.

Williams said she is pleased to join a Perris leadership team "with a visionary outlook on economic opportunities for the City."

Center of the hub

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas, Mayor Pro-Tem David Starr Rabb and City Councilmembers Tonya Burke and Malcolm Corona attended the Jingle Mingle.

Vargas said Perris is strategically placed to thrive economically.

The City lies at the geographical center of western Riverside County and boasts access to nearby airports, boasts its own Metrolink stations and lies on the I-215 freeway corridor and arterials like Ramona Expressway, Highway 74 and Ethanac Road. A new interchange at I-215 Placentia Avenue is expected to be completed in the next five years, and the prospect of some 2028 Olympic water sports using Lake Perris as the venue can only raise the profile and desirability of the City, he said.

"We are the center of the hub from San Bernardino to San Diego," Vargas said. "We have the land to develop. It's an exciting time for Perris. We are on the move."

Rabb, who with Burke serves on the City Council's economic development subcommittee, called Jingle Mingle "a great event that will provide an update about what's going on economically in the City."

Burke echoed sentiments that the future of Perris is bright. The City is committed to working with businesses to create jobs, wages and prosperity.

"A lot of great things are coming to Perris," she said. "A lot of things people are asking for will come to fruition. We are working with small businesses and community-based organizations to build a better Perris for everyone."

Corona said the Jingle Mingle "sends the message we are a business-friendly community."



Dr. Grace Williams addresses the audience attending the Jingle Mingle meet-and-greet event.

"We want our businesses to grow and thrive," he said. "We will support them in any way we can."

Coming to Perris

Business owners attending the holiday shindig included Tom and Blake Baggett, owners of Canyon Steel Fabricators, which manufactures commercial and industrial steel frames for buildings, offices, schools, homes, libraries and hospitals. The company expects to open a plant on Harley Knox Boulevard by September 2018 which will employ 35 to 40 highly skilled workers.

Tom Baggett said the City's welcoming attitude and "well-structured industrial and business parks" sealed the deal for the company.

"We got a great welcome from the City of Perris," he said. "Perris is really taking off!"

Josh Naggair, president of the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce, said he welcomed the opportunity to meet with fellow business owners, Perris elected representatives, administrators and economic development specialists. He praised the selection of Williams as the City's economic development guru, saying she brings energy, experience and enthusiasm to the job.

Pepi Jackson, an insurance broker who serves as president of the City of Perris Black Chamber of Commerce, agrees the business climate is heating up for mom-and-pop operations, to small shops to larger enterprises. Minority businesses are poised to prosper as well.

"The prospects for black businesses is growing enormously," Jackson said. "Industries are starting to see the value of Perris. The future of Perris is just phenomenal. We're at the beginning of a big economic boom."

Armando Hurtado, a real estate broker and founder and president of the Hispanic Association of Small Businesses, said he's received inquiries from prospective business owners looking to purchase real estate and take advantage of the potential opportunities from the cannabis industry. The City could reap windfalls from taxes imposed on new businesses. Logistics centers in north Perris also stand ready to accommodate new companies.

Hurtado said he believes 2018 will be a robust year for the City.

"I'm very optimistic," he said.

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