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Christmas Arrived Early on Santa's Christmas Trolley



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas hands out toys during a stop along the route of the Perris Christmas Trolley, which visited three City neighborhoods.

Christmas arrived early for hundreds of Perris youngsters, thanks to a City collaboration with businesses, developers, cops and firefighters and the Chamber of Commerce who delivered toys and good cheer from an old-fashion trolley car.

The "Perris Christmas Trolley" stopped at three different neighborhoods, where kids and parents lined up to receive an assortment of toys, candy and well-wishes from Perris elected officials and senior administrators and other Santa elves.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas and his wife, Julie, along with Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona handed out 800 hundred footballs, soccer balls, remote-controlled toys, drones, dolls, action figures, Peanuts characters, toy trains, Razors and other goodies. They were joined by City Manager Richard Belmudez, Assistant City Manager Clara Miramontes, Director of Community Services Sabrina Chavez, Counter Services Supervisor Veronica Arana and numerous employees from Code Enforcement, Public Works and Community Services also took part.

Chamber of Commerce President Josh Naggar also was on hand as was Katie Keyes of the Perris Valley Historical and Museum Association.

Donations came from Duke Realty, Action Star Games and a developer who requested anonymity. Several Perris municipal departments placed donation boxes throughout the City Hall Campus collecting goodies as did La Gare Coffee Roasters.

Much of the Christmas Trolley jaunt was live-streamed by Audio Visual Specialist Everett Hamby, and Intern, Karina Espinoza.

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Virginia Ramos and her son, Benjamin Ramos, 5, show off the set of toy golf clubs he received during the Dec. 15 Christmas Trolley ride.

Moving experience

Vargas said he was overwhelmed by the gratitude and kind remarks from dozens of thankful parents and children. Many related how they are struggling to pay rent, medical and utility bills, leaving little to purchase Christmas gifts.

"It really tugs on your heartstrings," Vargas said. "People are so thankful—that's what makes this so special. That's what it's all about. It's very rewarding to be part of Team Perris that puts on events that help our community."

Corona called the Christmas Trolley ride a "fantastic event" that reinforces the City's commitment to its residents.

"There are parts of our City with many deserving children and we want to make sure that every child has a nice Christmas," he said. "It's just nice to do. It's nice to see our community come together to brighten up the Yuletide."



Perris Counter Services Supervisor Veronica Arana supervises a line of children waiting to receive holiday toys during a Christmas Trolley stop.

The Christmas Trolley left City Hall at dusk on Dec. 15, accompanied by a fire engine, several police cruisers and motorcycles, all with lights flashing and sirens blaring.

They rolled through neighborhoods in Enchanted Heights, south of Downtown and north of City Hall. Ashley St. Romain was waiting at the last stop, along with her three children—Azlyn, 9, Austin, 5, and Ashton, 3.

St. Romain and her children were living in their car when they arrived from Louisiana a few weeks ago. They found quarters in a Perris apartment. Azlyn will soon be undergoing brain surgery, Christmas looked bleak—until team Perris rolled to the rescue.

"This is the best thing ever!" Ashley St. Romain said. "This is amazing. It makes me feel like we're wanted here. We're family."

The kids got Kingdom Builders toy figures and Nerf toys. Perris cops also handed them sticker badges.



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona poses for a photo with mom Maria Lopez and her children, Emalee Gonzalez, 10, and Andrew Gonzalez, 2.

"My children love these officers!" St. Romain said.

Overwhelmed and grateful

The Christmas Trolley also made the holiday for Enchanted Heights resident Desire Ramirez. She fought back tears as she related her tight financial situation. After paying rent and other necessities, Ramirez said she went to a \$5 store to shop for gifts for her three children—Azira Delariva, 10; Mason Delariva, 5, and Frank Delariva, 4. The City's efforts changed her holiday outlook from sad to glad.

"I'm overwhelmed and grateful," Ramirez. "I didn't know what to do. I'm go grateful to the City. I'm so thankful."

Ramirez said she takes her children every year to the Holiday Tree Lighting ceremony and other community events. Her kids received a Fuzzy Doll and Hulk and Incredibles action figures.



Perris resident Ashley St. Romain was living in her car before finding shelter in Perris. With her are son Ashton, 3, Austin, 5, and daughter Azlyn, 9. "This is the best thing ever!" Ashley St. Romain said.

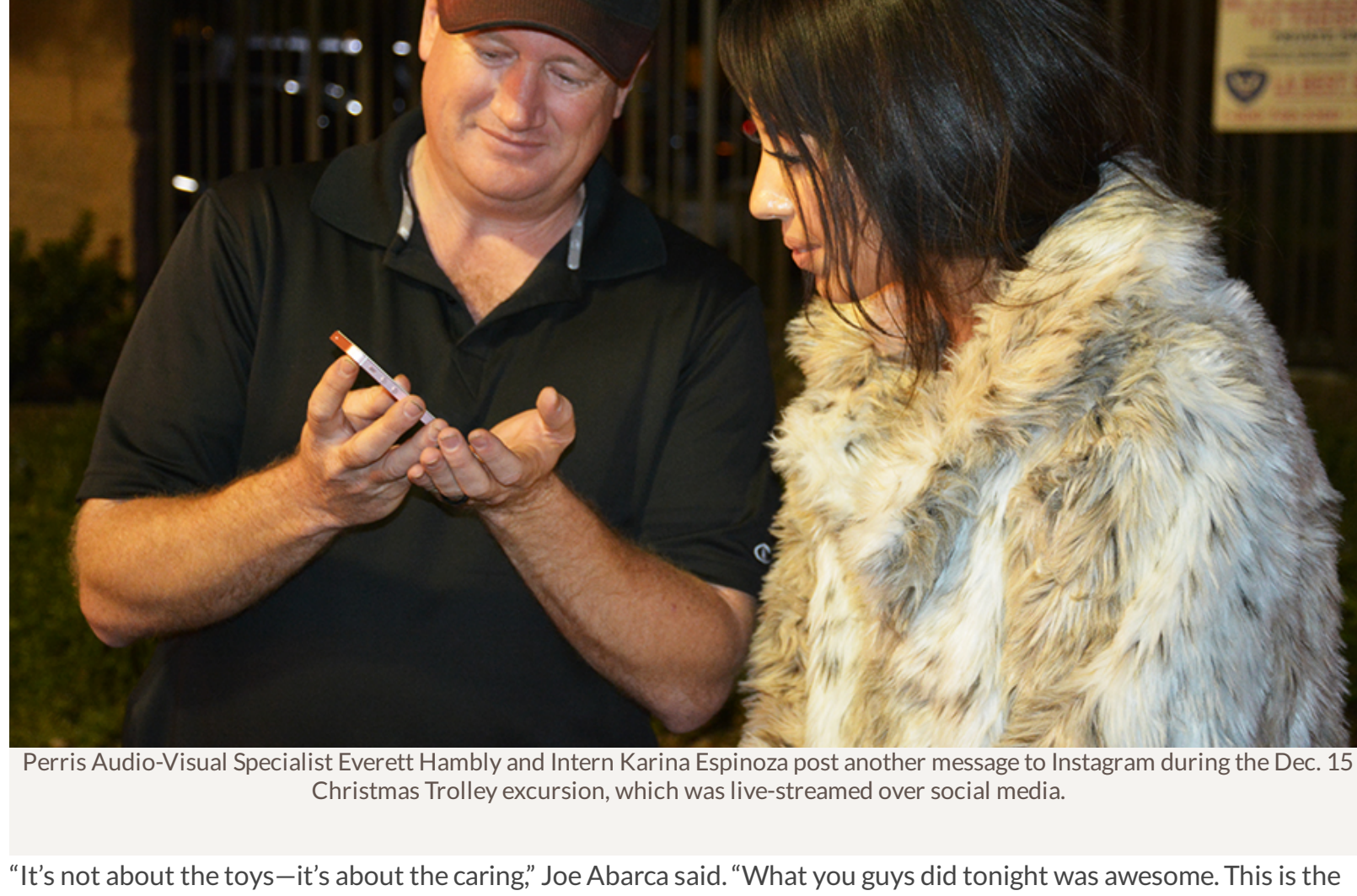
Single mom Beatriz Rodríguez also expressed her gratitude. Her son, Ivan Mandujana, took home a set of toy golf clubs.

"It's nice to bring the Christmas spirit," she said. "It's a blessing. I don't have money for a lot of presents. This helps me out a lot and I thank the City a lot for it."

A line of more than 75 children waited patiently when the Christmas Trolley caravan arrived just south of Downtown Perris.

Some parents thought the appearance of a fire engine and cop cars meant either a residence was burning or a high-speed chase was in progress. Imagine the surprise when they learned the Yuletide had arrived early.

Joe and Alejandra Abarca were delighted that their son, Gio, 3, got himself a Machbox tractor. They were even more pleased the City and its partners took the time to drop by and dispense gifts, candy and holiday cheer.



Perris Audio-Visual Specialist Everett Hamby and Intern Karina Espinoza post another message to Instagram during the Dec. 15 Christmas Trolley excursion, which was live-streamed over social media.

"It's not about the toys—it's about the caring," Joe Abarca said. "What you guys did tonight was awesome. This is the best Christmas these kids could ever have."

City Manager Belmudez and Counter Services Supervisor Arana—who played a major role in organizing the trolley excursion—said the hard work to organize, plan and complete the evening's excursion more than paid off in the end.

"The warm feelings and sentiments we received from the public makes us realize how much this mattered to it. It was the residents who took part," he said. "We received more in good wishes and warm comments that we gave out. It was a great community event."

Arana said the City plans to continue the Christmas Trolley next year and make it bigger and better.

"We appreciate the chance to give something back to the City of Perris and are grateful for the nice sentiments from the people," she said. "We hoped we made the holidays a little brighter for our residents and we wish them well this Christmas and beyond."



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