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30th Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony



Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez, City Clerk Nancy Salazar, City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, Mayor Michael Vargas, Police Chief Greg Fellows and City Councilman Malcolm Corona at the Dec. 1 Tree Lighting Ceremony at City Hall.

Media Contact

Joe Vargo
Public Information Officer
951-943-6100
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Hundreds of Perris residents and dozens of performers turned out to kick off the holiday season in Perris Dec. 1 as the City celebrated its annual Tree Lighting Ceremony at the City Hall campus.

In addition to musical, singing and dancing performances, the evening's entertainment included a petting zoo for children, rides on a train around campus and the appearance of Old St. Nick himself, who arrived on the back of Perris City fire engine.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Tree Lighting Ceremony. Other holiday events include the annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 9 and Breakfast with Santa Dec. 16.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas led the contingent of elected representatives at the tree-lighting. Others included City Councilman Malcolm Corona, City Councilwomen Tonya Burke and Rita Rogers and City Clerk Nancy Salazar. City Manager Richard Belmudez and Assistant City Manager Darren Madkin also attended.

"This event is always a great big treat for the kids," said Vargas, who attended the festivities with his wife, Julie, and grandchildren. "It brings families together and it's another great form of community engagement. It just keeps getting bigger and bigger. It's always rewarding for any elected official to be able to put a smile on peoples' faces and this event sure accomplishes that. It just keeps getting bigger and bigger!"



Perris Police Chief Greg Fellows and Perris Mayor Michael Vargas at the 30th Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

As the skies darkened, the countdown to throwing the official switch to light the tree began. Vargas called two youngsters from the crowd—Sierra Vista Elementary School students Mark Velez, 7, and his sister, Desiree, 6—to the stage to push the button that illuminated the holiday tree and sent cheers through the crowd.

Holiday excitement, sentiments

The Mayor, City Council and City Clerk expressed their wishes for a safe and enjoyable holiday season for all Perris residents and visitors.

"The holiday season is always exciting in the City of Perris," said City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, who attended with her daughter, Jaylyn. "Folks of all different backgrounds come together to celebrate. It's a celebration of life."

City Councilman Malcolm Corona brought along wife, Mila, and 2-year-old son Malcolm. Corona said he attended tree lighting ceremonies while growing up in Perris and always remembered the event as a fun time. It still carries the same charm as a parent and elected representative.



Perris City Councilman Malcolm Corona, wife, Mila, and son, Malcolm enjoy the festivities at the 30th Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony Dec. 1 at the Perris City Hall Campus.

"It's a joy to see all the happy faces," he said. "This event gives our residents the chance to enjoy inexpensive holiday fun with their families and it gives the City of Perris a chance to give back to its residents. I had a great time when I was a kid and it's great to be able to bring my family and have a great time with them."

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers attended with her grandson, Jordan.

"This is a wonderful way to start the Christmas season," Rogers said. "It's wonderful to have so many families participate in Christmas activities in the City. It's a very special season."

Salazar, who attended with her daughter, Khloe, 7, called the tree lighting "a great and amazing event" that shows the City's commitment to its residents. "It's hard to believe the tree-lighting has gone on for 30 years!" she said. "It's great seeing families and kids all smiling. This event is the best!"

Home grown talent



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke and her daughter, Jaylyn, are all smiles during the 30th Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Entertainment included performances by City-sponsored groups, school ensembles and bands and cheer teams. The California Military Institute sent three groups—Folklorico dancers, middle-school singers and the school band—totaling more than 100 students.

Leona Sibley, a middle-school teacher and student advisor, said the students appreciate the chance to "grow and soar and show off to their community." Sibley said many students at CMI consider the letters to mean "Come to Make an Impression."

"It's great for our students to participate in the community—to show their love, joy, singing and peace," Sibley said. "Perris is a great City for kids!"

Desiree Walton leads a City-sponsored ballet class. She said she enjoys the work because of the energy exuded by her students, who range from 2 to 12 years old.

"I love the kids' energy," Walton said. "I appreciate the City of Perris for putting on this event every year. It makes them feel important and that they are part of the Christmas season."



Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers attended the Tree Lighting Ceremony with her grandson, Jordan, 6.

Jacori Neal, 14, and his brother, Jaelin, 12, performed their version of the song "This is My Wish" before the receptive audience. The brothers have been performing since they were 5 years old and have performed at the Tree Lighting for the past two years.

Jacori said he appreciates how well the City organizes the event and the joy it brings to those who perform and watch the entertainment.

"It's a great event that everyone in Perris can enjoy," he said.



Perris City Hall
101 N. D Street
Perris, CA 92570

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