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Perris Bundles up for Wintry Tree Lighting Ceremony



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers lead the countdown to the moment when the City's Christmas Tree is lit for the first time.

Blustery and cold weather could not chill the spirit of hundreds of Perris residents who turned out Dec. 2 to witness the awe and majesty of the City's 29th annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch led a contingent of elected officials who attended the tree lighting, which kicks off the City's holiday season with musical, singing and dance performances. Busch was joined by Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers, City Councilman Mark Yarbrough and City Councilman-elect Malcolm Corona.

"I know it's a little chilly out tonight but it will not dampen our holiday spirit," Busch said. "We want you to enjoy yourself tonight and enjoy the entertainment. It sure is a pleasure to host this event on behalf of our community."

Rogers posed a question to all the youngsters in the audience.

"Who's been good?" she asked. "Who's going to be getting some toys? All you boys and girls need to be very good until Christmas!"

Yarbrough said the Tree Lighting Ceremony offered something for everyone—entertainment, Santa Claus arriving on a fire engine, a petting zoo, train rides and snacks.

"Have a great Christmas," he told the audience.

In subsequent remarks, Yarbrough said the enthusiastic response to the tree lighting shows that Perris residents appreciate the City's commitment to fostering the holiday spirit. In addition to the tree lighting, other holiday season activities include the Dec. 10 Christmas Parade and the Dec. 17 Breakfast With Santa.

"We are clearly in touch with community sentiments," he said. "You can see it with programs like this."

Corona attended with his wife, Mila, and son, Malcolm, 18 months.

"I used to come here when I was a kid," Corona said. "It's nice being here as an elected official and a dad. It's a great event that brings the community together. It's a time to reflect on all the positive things we have at our homes and in the community."



Perris City Councilman-elect Malcolm Corona with his son, Malcolm, at the 29th annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Outstanding entertainment

This year's entertainment lineup included a violin solo, an operatic rendition of a holiday classic, folklorico dancing and several concert performances from local schools.

Miguel Wences, 14, a California Military Institute freshman, kicked off the entertainment with a violin performance that included "Silent Night" and "Hallelujah." Miguel has been playing the violin for five years. This year marked the first time he's performed at the tree lighting. He received thunderous applause.

"I appreciate the opportunity to perform at this event," he said. "

Julie Salas, 10, and Emily Valencia, 12, are members of the dance group Movement Lifestyle, organized and under the direction of City Recreation Leader Jessica Munoz.

Julie, a fifth-grader who attends Triple Crown Elementary School, said she enjoys the tree lighting.

"I get to do what I love in front of my friends and family. I get to see a beautiful tree lit up and I get to dance in front of my friends," she said.

Among the selections the group danced to was the holiday classic "Santa Claus is Coming to Town."

Emily, 12, a seventh-grader at Innovative Horizons Charter School, said she loves dancing to hip-hop music.

"I'm thankful the City of Perris is letting us perform at this event," she said.

Trumpeter Jesus Chavoya, 17, a senior at the CMI, said he considers his bandmates as a second family. The CMI band performed a medley of Christmas music, including one selection that honored residents in the war-torn city of Sarajevo.

"Christmas music is so iconic that people know most of the popular songs," Jesus said. "But in the band we can put our spin on it—and that makes people smile. I appreciate the work the City of Perris does to put on this show. I'm proud to be part of this community. It's a great community."



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough (right) enjoys festivities at the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony with Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers.

Honoring dad

Ben Cooper put an operatic twist on his version of the timeless Christmas classic, "O Holy Night." It's his way of honoring his father, who considered the song his favorite holiday carol. Cooper also performed in this year's annual Perris Got Talent contest.

Cooper says singing is an important part of his life. So important that he's spent the last 45 years training his voice to make it the best it can be.

"I love singing," he said. "I love Broadway music and opera. I enjoy seeing the audience enjoy it. I'm grateful the City of Perris provides this great opportunity to let me sing."

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