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Grand Christmas Parade Delights Perris Crowd

Large and enthusiastic crowds lined D Street to witness the City of Perris's 28th annual Christmas Parade, an extravaganza that featured marching bands, floats, precision drill teams, classic cars, equestrian units, a beloved Asian elephant and an appearance by Old St. Nick himself.

More than 80 entries took part in the 2016 edition of the annual parade, which was highlighted by the appearance of City and regional elected officials who wished all Perris families a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas smiles as he walks the route during the City of Perris annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 10.

Mayor Michael Vargas walked part of the parade route, handing out goodies to kids along the way and shaking hands with residents. He said he has been participating in the parade since 2004, first as a resident, then as a trustee of the Val Verde Unified School District and now as Mayor-elect.

"I always look forward to this parade," Vargas said. "It's fantastic to see all the families and schools to come out and support this great event. I wish everyone Happy Holidays. It's a great time for Perris."



Former Perris Mayor Daryl Busch waves to the crowd as he drive the route during the annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 10.

Former Mayor Daryl Busch said the Christmas Parade unites the fabric of the Perris community.

"This parade brings churches, youth groups, civic associations, schools and others from throughout the Perris Valley and beyond," Busch said. "It's always great to see the enjoyment people get from participating in this event. It makes us feel good to know that Perris is in the holiday spirit."



Perris Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers greets the throngs of people who watched the City's 28th annual Christmas Parade.

As usual, Tai, a 47-year-old 9,000-pound Asian elephant, took her place at the head of the parade. Tai has been appeared in several Christmas parades and her appearance always draws cheers and applause as she performs her routine, which includes standing on her front and hind legs.

Tai lives at Have Trunk Will Travel, a Perris elephant rescue haven. Owner Gary Johnson said Asian elephants are in grave danger from poaching and loss of habitat. Just 3,000 are known to exist in the wild. Asian elephants differ from their African cousins in that they have smaller ears. Johnson called Tai "social, smart and sensitive" and capable of understanding 75 voice prompts.

"We love taking part in this parade," Johnson said. "This is where we live. We want to be part of this community."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke waves to the crowd during the City's annual Christmas Parade.

Crowds lined the D Street parade route. Many snapped images on their cellphones. Others cheered when they saw a family member or friend march by while participating in the fun. Spectators watched vintage cars roll by, festooned floats and marching bands playing Christmas classics like "Joy to the World," "Jingle Bells" and "We Wish You a Merry Christmas."

Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers said she is delighted to see Perris continue "its tradition of hosting a Christmas parade." She noted the parade is just one of three major events celebrating the Yuletide. The City recently hosted its annual tree-lighting ceremony and will soon celebrate its "Breakfast with Santa" program.

"It makes me feel really good to see the community so united," Rogers said. "It's always good as a community leader to see the community come together to celebrate Christmas."

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke took an extra-special interest in this year's parade. Her daughter, Jaylyn, marched as part of the color guard for the recently opened Orange Vista High School. Burke said not many communities can afford to fund and host a Christmas parade.

"It just goes to show you what a great leadership team we have in Perris," Burke said. "It's always a pleasure to host this parade. I hope Santa is good to everyone and I wish everybody a safe, peaceful and merry holiday season."

City Councilman Malcolm Corona attended the celebration with his wife, Mila, and son, Malcolm, 18 months. He walked part of the parade route, tossing candy to kids he passed along the way. The parade began in front of American Legion Post 595 at D and Eighth streets and culminated at Perris City Hall, about a mile away.

"I see a lot of smiles—from young people to older ones," Corona said. "It's a great event to showcase our City, our residents, our Downtown and our rich history."



Perris City Councilman Malcolm Corona with his wife, Mila, and son, Malcolm, at the annual Christmas Parade.

City Councilman David Starr Rabb attended many Christmas parades as a kid growing up in Perris.

"This is one of our signature events," Rabb said. It's good to see so much of the community turn out. A big thank-you to our City staff to make sure the parade flows so smoothly. It's beautiful to see everyone participate in this parade."



Perris City Councilman David Starr Rabb waves to the crowd during the annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 10.

Former City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, who attended with his wife, Shelly, said of the parade: "I love this event. It always brings out the best in our community. Our community is a melting pot and it's wonderful to see everyone turn out to celebrate the season."

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, a lifelong resident of the Perris Valley, has attended many Christmas parades, noted that weather was sunny and warm, perfect conditions for band members, horses, walkers and watchers. It's usually that way in Perris, he said.

"It seems like we're always blessed with good weather," Ashley said. "God and nature combine to make this a special day."



Former Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough and his wife, Shelly, smile as they greet the audience during the annual Christmas Parade.

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