

Parade draws thousands to downtown Salinas

Under balmy but cooling evening skies an estimated 35,000 folks lined downtown Salinas streets on Sunday to enjoy the 11th annual Holiday Parade of Lights.

Just after 6 p.m., the Thunder Riders Motorcycle Group and a Salinas Police Department patrol car got the parade started from Acacia Street and South Main as throngs sat waiting in foldable chairs — some wrapped in blankets and eating pizza in eager anticipation.

Sandra Madrigal and her mother Graciela from Prunedale were attending for the first time. I'm here "to celebrate the holidays," said Sandra Madrigal. "I'm excited though; I'm looking forward to it," she said, before the parade started.

The parade is made possible under the aegis of the Oldtown Salinas Association with the help of about 36 sponsors and 140 volunteers.

As people streamed into the downtown area Salinas police officers on motorcycles roamed up and down the parade route exchanging handshakes with youngsters. Vendors walked Main Street selling peanut brittle, cotton candy and brightly lit wands. There were contests to see which bubble gum chewer could blow the biggest bubble

and the Salinas Host Lions Club sold hot beverages and hot dogs to benefit needy children who need eyeglasses.

"Every year it's a good crowd," said officer Raul Rosales, who was on a mountain bike.

Near the parade front, the Salinas Union High School All-District Band — all 125 strong — from area high and middle schools, pumped out a drumming staccato beat.

Before the start, public address systems played "Silent Night" and "Santa Claus is Coming to Town."

Angelo Ortega of Salinas was at curbside with 13 or 14 members of his extended family from Salinas, Castroville and Gonzales. "We enjoyed it last year and it was good for the family so we said let's come again," he said.

His niece Hannah Brown, 14, held Ortega's daughter Eden, 2. Brown said she was there "just to spend time with my family

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and have a good time."

Jennifer Gammill of Salinas was there with her three children. Two of them, Kobee and Kayeleigh, were in the parade while Koree watched with mom.

"My daughter (Kayeleigh) is performing with her dance team from school — the Boronda Meadowhawks," said Gammill. Gammill has attended the parade every year.

Downtown restaurants were busy along the parade route which ended at North Main and the National Steinbeck Center. The CherryBean Coffee House had a line that extended out the door.

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Diana Munoz, 17, marches down Main Street at the start of the Parade of Lights. Travis Geske/The Salinas Californian

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