



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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Riverside to Celebrate Festival of Lights 25th Anniversary with Rose Parade Float

Private donations will fund the \$275,000 project that will be part of the parade on Jan. 1, 2018

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – For the first time in more than 50 years, Riverside will have a float in the Rose Parade to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the annual Festival of Lights and to thank its creators, Mission Inn Hotel & Spa owners Duane and Kelly Roberts.

A group of community leaders will raise the estimated \$275,000 in private donations that will be needed to build the float and pay for other costs. The non-profit Greater Riverside Chamber Foundation will head up the fundraising effort.

“Our historic downtown is seeing record levels of investment, and Duane and Kelly Roberts’ leadership in ensuring the Mission Inn is a world-class hotel has been the catalyst for much of this success,” Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “They took another bold step in creating the Festival of Lights, which is now an internationally renowned event that has drawn millions of tourists to our city and provided joy to countless families.”

The Festival of Lights draws an estimated 500,000 people to downtown Riverside every holiday season, from the day after Thanksgiving to early January. About 75,000 people each year attend the ceremony to switch on the six million lights, animatronic figures and other attractions.

“The theme to the Rose Parade this year is ‘Making a Difference,’ and the Roberts’ have made an unbelievable difference in Riverside,” said Cindy Roth, President and CEO of the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce, the parent organization of the Chamber Foundation. “Their commitment to improving the Festival every year as an international destination is incredible.”

USA Today readers named the Festival of Lights the Best Public Lights Display in 2014 and the Best Holiday Festival in 2015. The switch-on ceremony is covered by all the major television networks in Southern California, and the roughly six-week event generates an estimated 255 million favorable impressions across all media.

“The Festival of Lights is a major community gathering spot every year,” Mayor Pro Tem Mike Gardner said. “For many families in Riverside and the surrounding communities, the Festival of Lights is a way to kick off the holiday spirit.”

With the 25th anniversary of the Festival of Lights approaching later this year, Riverside officials began searching for a way to both commemorate that anniversary and express thanks to the Roberts family for its quarter-century of dedication to Riverside.

They eventually landed on the idea of entering a float in the iconic Rose Parade, a New Year’s Day tradition. Riverside officials, including Assistant City Manager Al Zelinka, worked to earn an invitation to the 2018 parade from the Pasadena Tournament of Roses.

More than 700,000 people attend the Rose Parade each year, and an estimated 73 million people worldwide watch the parade on television. The website – www.TournamentofRoses.com – received more than 32 million page views last year.

“The Rose Parade has been one of the greatest traditions in Southern California for well over a century,” Zelinka said. “Having a float in this iconic event will help us tell the story of good things happening in Riverside.”

Donations can be sent to the Greater Riverside Chamber Foundation, 3985 University Avenue, Riverside, CA 92501. Donations are tax deductible.