

Iris Festival Celebrates City Flower and Offers Attractions for All Ages

On January 8, 1963 the iris was adopted as the official city flower... couple this with Porterville being home to the world's largest distributor of re-blooming iris, and it only seems fitting that an Iris Festival should happen in this community. Porterville's very first Iris Festival was held in the Spring of 1999 and welcomed over 2,000 people. Since that time, the Iris Festival has grown significantly, and in its eleventh year in 2009, the Porterville Chamber anticipates the festival's attendance to reach 25,000.

The Chamber is the organizer of the Iris Festival and presents it with the cooperation of the City of Porterville and major sponsors, Eagle Mountain Casino and the Tule River Tribal Council. The event committee annually welcomes the opportunity to present the festival in conjunction with activities such as Porterville Celebrates Reading – the Margaret J. Slattery Literacy Fair, the Gleaning Seniors Pancake Breakfast, and Central California Blood Center's Community Blood Drive. "These partnering events, the involvement of other non-profits, the financial and in-kind contributions of local businesses, the participation of entertainers, and so much more, has truly resulted in a spectacular community event. Residents and visitors annually look forward to enjoying a beautiful Spring day in Porterville," commented Chamber President/CEO, Donnette Silva Carter.

The 11th anniversary festival will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in downtown Porterville on Main Street, where there will be vendors, food booths, crafters, entertainment, amusements and fun for everyone. Sutton's Iris Garden is the second venue for the event, where festival goers can enjoy self-guided tours through the gardens of colorful iris. The garden, at 16592 Road 208, will host over 5,000 visitors on Iris Festival day. To ensure that attendees can easily get to the garden, free shuttle buses back and forth from downtown (the lot behind the former JC Penney store) to Sutton's will be offered. Also, the Porterville City Trolley is providing free rides to the Porterville Fairgrounds where children will delight in attending Porterville Celebrates Reading. This complimentary service provides a convenience for families to park at one site for the day and enjoy the activities at both events.

"The committee recommends that everyone hop on the convenient shuttles for a comfortable and no hassle ride to Sutton's Iris Gardens. You don't have to be concerned about travel or parking, and the shuttle drops attendees directly at the entrances for the garden or the reading fair," explains Gary Giraudi, festival chairperson.

Attendees will be able to start their shopping early when the festival opens at 9 a.m., with 175 arts, crafts, food and other booths to choose from. Vendors from all over the Valley, as well as California and some neighboring states, will be displaying such unique items as woodwork, yard art, home decor gifts, hand crafted jewelry, candles, wood toys, porcelain dolls, children's items, clothing, ceramic gifts and much more. Delicious food choices will be available throughout the day including, funnel cakes, tri-tip sandwiches, hamburgers, polish dogs, shaved ice, fruit smoothies, tamales, tacos, corn-on-the-cob, and fresh fruit – all to delight the taste buds. Cinnamon glazed almonds and pecans, kettle corn, home-baked goodies, and other specialty food items will be offered as well. Non-profit organizations and local businesses will participate to answer questions and distribute information on services and products available in the area.

The Mill Street Entertainment Stage, located at Mill and Main Street, and Centennial Park Gazebo will feature a number of entertainers throughout the day. There is a great mix of musical and dance groups performing throughout the day. The Chamber is excited to showcase all of these talents.

Children who attend the Iris Festival will delight in the activities presented just for them as they visit the Tulare County Federal Credit Union Children's Fun Area. Street chalk art, face painting, fingerprinting, bounce houses, a big slide, amusements, and the coloring table await children of all ages. The famous people train will be offering free rides for both children and adults, up and down the festival route. Also, the Chamber has again teamed with local schools to add to the Iris Festival fun. Children in Porterville area schools received a coloring picture of an Iris that was also printed in The Recorder. (One is included in the insert as well.) Each child who brings one of these colored iris to the Children's Area will receive a free gift (while supplies last) and be entered to win one of several fantastic prizes.

At the south end of the Iris Festival, attendees will find a showing of some great vehicles presented at the COOL Rides Exhibition. Attendees get the opportunity to vote for the People's Choice Awards for best two-wheel and four-wheel vehicles. New this year will be raffle drawings for both those voting and for the drivers of entries.

Art lovers will be sure to enjoy the Porterville Art Association's Annual Spring Art Walk. Porterville is home to a number of talented artists and this event provides individuals the opportunity to take a leisurely, self-guided tour of unique artwork located in various businesses throughout the downtown area. Pick up your route guide at the event information booth in front of the Chamber office.

The generous support of local sponsors is essential to the successful underwriting and coordination of the Iris Festival. Eagle Mountain Casino has been the long-time presenting sponsor of the event. Likewise, the Tulare County Federal Credit Union's sponsorship of the Children's Area makes it possible to offer activities for all ages. Other sponsors include: Tule River Tribal Council, Galaxy 9 Theatre, Setton Pistachio, Sierra View District Hospital, and Wal-Mart Distribution Center. Media sponsors for the festival are: The Porterville Recorder, KTIP AM1450, KJUG, 104.9, La Maquina, and Azteca America. Additional entities who contribute to the event's success include; Porterville Sheltered Workshop, Porterville High Academy of Business, Porterville PD Explorers, and Sequoia Beverage.

"Through its ten previous years, the Iris Festival has grown to become a premier event for Porterville and Tulare County. We have a huge local draw of attendees and also welcome guests from through-out the Valley and locations beyond. Each year we look forward to hosting over 20,000 people in downtown Porterville and Sutton's. It's fun for me to see the people come out and enjoy the event and our community," stated Board Chair and committee member Augie Gonzalez.

One might assume that the event was only begun to honor the city flower and provide family entertainment, but the Porterville Chamber had a greater vision in sight. The Board sought an

opportunity to promote Porterville and increase tourism by bringing people to the community. When visitors come here, they see what the area has to offer for lifestyle, retail, recreation, and sites of interest. A one-day festival event provides the venue of interest and then Porterville's other offerings provide the motivation for return visits. Of course, as Silva Carter adds, "When people come to town, even if it's just that day, they fill up their gas tanks before they leave and they visit our retail establishments. Additionally, there are many out-of-town vendors who come in advance, rent hotel rooms and eat at local restaurants. All of this gives the local economy a quick boost, and the impact can be more long-term when festival attendees return because they like what they see and where they shop during the event.

Tourism industry statistics show that the average visitor, to an area such as Porterville, spends \$135 per day with lodging, and \$78 per day without. That income comes into our economy and becomes part of the 'multiplier effect' where every \$1 dollar spent actually has the impact of \$5 once it travels through the economy.

Admittance to the festival and Sutton's Iris Gardens is free as is the shuttle service. For more information on the 11th Annual Iris Festival, contact the Porterville Chamber at 784-7502.