



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE CITY CAMELLIA FESTIVAL

It all started in 1944 with a contest held by the Women's Club of Temple City to choose a flower and a slogan for the community. Mrs. Ralph Saunders submitted the winner, "Temple City Home of Camellias".

In 1945, Mrs. Dan Crowley, President of the Women's Club originated the idea that the slogan should be put to work. At her suggestion and with the help of Mrs. Loverne Morris, Sharon Ray Pearson, then eight months old, was crowned Queen and rode in an open car down Las Tunas Drive as a handful of Camp Fire Girls gave out Camellia blossoms to pedestrians.

In 1946, at the request of the Woman's Club, the Chamber of Commerce assumed the promotion of the slogan. All local youth groups, numbering approximately 150 members, formed a parade beginning at the theatre parking lot, at Rosemead Boulevard and Las Tunas Drive and ending at the first reviewing stand at Primrose and Las Tunas. Queen Nancy Harp and her two princesses were honored, the Monterey Park Girls Drum and Bugle Corps played, the Chamber of Commerce President presented the tiny little girls with lockets and the crowd went home. In 1947 the Chamber of Commerce decided that the festival should be put to better use by further promoting the growth of local youth groups. It was also decided this year that the Camellia Royalty should be chosen from local first graders with the idea that after having participated in the Camellia Parade they would all want to belong to one of the youth organizations. A King, Queen, two princes and two princesses were chosen. More elaborate plans were made for honoring the royal group with entertainment and the merchants donating gifts to the children.

In 1948, Chairman Blaine Bender with his vision and good showmanship inspired the community to really make something of this event. A theme was chosen for the first time, "Jewels of Temple City", and youth groups were invited to enter miniature floats, which ranged from decorated doll buggies and bicycles, to plywood mounted on a coaster wagon; 23 floats turned up for the parade. Also added was a carnival, coronation pageant written by Blaine Bender and Gomer Cool. Monies derived from the event were used to establish a Temple City Youth Center, with Civic and Service groups enthusiastically plunged in to do the necessary work. "Uncle" Phil Memole wrote the Camellia Festival March, and the King and Queen who were crowned on Friday night, opened the carnival immediately following the ceremony. With the success of the event, folks of the community felt the Youth Center was assured. The next morning dawned bright and clear, the parade went off without a hitch, everyone adjourned to the carnival, and then came the rain! Organizations who had worked long and hard to plan moneymaking booths could only hastily pack their wares and head for home. Martin Shows closed shop and the festival was over. At the Chamber of Commerce meeting following, service and civic groups reported a profit of \$381.00 to be turned over to the Chamber of Commerce for the expenses and Youth Center. Directors of the Chamber felt that every penny should be used to establish the Youth Center Fund, and therefore, voted to assume the expenses of the Festival itself.

In 1949, rules for the parade were strengthened, and more people took interest. Because it was the year of the California Centennial, the theme selected was, "Golden Miners". Tickets were sold for two ponies, and just in case the winner had no desire to own a horse, two fifty-dollar War Bonds were purchased. Needless to say, the Festival was left holding the bag, with two ponies. It was quite a struggle getting rid of the livestock. However, the carnival and the first Camellia Show were a financial success. The parade was divided into age group divisions and the community was pleased with its efforts. For the first time service clubs were invited to enter floats in recognition of their youth activities.

Each festival thereafter proved only that the event was growing in size and popularity. Youth groups improved on their float presentations so much that it was decided that more prizes needed to be added, including a Sweepstakes Award. Local groups were growing in membership by leaps and bounds. Big name entertainers were happy to act as Grand Marshal and narrate the parade down the boulevard. The festival was getting national recognition. In many newspapers and magazines Temple City became famous for its interest in children and as a "Home Community".

It was in recognition of the significance of family life by its residents that the Camellia Festival was founded. Its purpose of encouraging every young person in the community to belong to a recognized youth organization and to participate in the affairs of their city is still its stated purpose.

Starting with a handful of youngsters that first year, the parade has grown in size and significance to the point where Temple City prepares yearly to welcome over 5,000 children to its parade and greet more than 20,000 visitors to the city. Through the years there has been Coronation Balls and Art and Talent Shows in addition to the Carnival and Parade.

Now, the Temple City Camellia Festival is at 501(c)(4) Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation and Officially Sponsored by the City of Temple City. The Festival takes place the last full weekend in February. A Royal Court consisting of a King, Queen, two Princes, two Princesses, and four Banner Carriers is selected from first grade students in the Temple City Unified School District or who reside in the City of Temple City and a Coronation is held in early February attended by the public and local dignitaries. Among their duties is to open the Carnival on Friday and ride in the Camellia Parade on Saturday morning.

You would be hard pressed to find a long-term Temple City resident who had not at some point walked in the Camellia Parade. Most will remember the youth group they walked with, the float they made, or the rides they enjoyed at the carnival.

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