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Pioneer Day parade draws community to downtown Chico

By ROBIN EPLEY - Staff Writer

Posted: 05/08/2011 12:16:37 AM PDT

CHICO -- Nearing its 100th anniversary, the annual Pioneer Day parade in Chico is a local tradition for many.

This year's theme was "Celebrating Athletic Enthusiasm! Building a Stronger Community By Breaking A Sweat."

The parade's grand marshals were Chico resident Haley Clark, an Olympic silver medalist in swimming, and Chico High School senior Nahshon Garrett, a national champion wrestler.

Floats wound their way through downtown Saturday morning and included the Boys and Girls Club of the North Valley, Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., NorCal Roller Girls, the Butte Humane Society and Azad's Martial Arts, among many others. The parade started and ended with a performance by the Pleasant Valley High School marching band.

● PHOTO GALLERY of the Pioneer Day Parade

Richard Elsom, president of Celebration of People inc., which has organized the parade since 2001, said floats and marching entries were down by about a third from last year.

"We didn't lose any of our regulars," he said, but parades in Willows, Durham and Oroville were also a draw for people.

A higher number of vendors set up shop on Fourth Street between Main Street and Broadway. As usual, the Shriners Club offered its hamburger and bean feed, which serves lunch to hungry parade-goers.

Also happening at the time of the parade was the Boys and Girls Club's "Be

a Club Kid For The Day," with activities for children at the Wall Street facility.

Eleven-year parade announcer Debbie Cobb of KNVN news and newcomer Matt Ray of KPAY radio shared announcing duties.

"It's a cliché," Cobb said, but, "I love Chico, I love the community. It's a way to give back and to bring everyone together."

Cobb said she likes how it highlights all of the businesses that really support Chico, and how much fun the parade is for children. She also said seeing fraternities and sororities march was nice, because, "They often don't get credit for the work they do in the community."

Jeff and Jenny Merrell of Chico brought their daughters Hazel, 7, and Lily, 5, downtown for breakfast and were surprised to see the parade setting up.

Hazel and Lily were enjoying the free goodies passed out by the marchers, including a small fishing rod, toothbrushes and lots of candy.

"This is the best day ever!" Hazel said, watching the PV High School Band march by.

"I think it's cool," Jeff Merrell said. "The weather's been perfect and it's a perfect small-town experience."

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