



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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Festival of Lights to Continue Without Traditional Switch-On Ceremony

Ongoing COVID-19 pandemic makes it impossible to predict if a large event can be held safely

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The Mission Inn Hotel & Spa will once again host its Festival of Lights this year and has made the difficult decision to cancel the traditional Switch-On Ceremony because of concerns about the potential COVID-19 public health impacts associated with the Delta Variant. The City of Riverside also has reduced its usual programming this year to ensure the public's safety.

The Mission Inn Hotel & Spa will sparkle with millions of lights and decorations, continuing a holiday tradition that has delighted Riverside for decades and drawn visitors from around the globe. Festival of Lights has been recognized as one of the nation's most popular holiday events, enchanting visitors of all ages with the Mission Inn's décor and festivities surrounded by the charm of Riverside's historic Downtown. As a result, this year's Festival of Lights will largely mirror the 2020 event, which was the first to be scaled back due to COVID-19.

"A generation of Riversiders has grown up with the Festival of Lights as a much-loved tradition," Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson said. "We greatly appreciate our partners at the Mission Inn Hotel & Spa for their years of investment in this tradition, and we eagerly await the return of the switch-on ceremony in 2022. Until then, this 2021 season will still provide many of the signature lights and decorations that have come to attract locals and visitors alike."

The Festival of Lights will continue to feature the traditional lights and decorations at the Mission Inn Hotel & Spa, as well as City-sponsored holiday décor in the surrounding areas, including holiday-themed selfie stations, holiday trees, large ornaments, a sleigh, bows and garland on lights and bridges, and an assortment of holiday light displays. However, because of the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic, many traditional features, including live entertainment, attractions, food vendors and horse-drawn carriages, had to be cancelled.

City staff is evaluating ways to potentially enhance the Festival grounds surrounding the Mission Inn with additional decorations and lights along Main Street. Because of governmental contracting

requirements, the City must make decisions now because many key vendors must be notified this month. Final proposals will go to the City Council for review.

Historically, Festival of Lights has kicked off with the Switch-On Ceremony, complete with an exciting countdown and fireworks display that attracted 75,000 people to Downtown Riverside the Friday after Thanksgiving. Once the lights are switched on, they are a nightly attraction at the Mission Inn, drawing thousands of visitors to Riverside throughout the holiday season.

“We are hopeful that the 30th anniversary next year will be a time when we can return to the Festival as we knew it prior to COVID-19.” Mayor Pro Tem Gaby Plascencia said.

For the latest information and resources regarding COVID-19 -- www.RiversideCA.gov/COVID-19