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Orinda on parade: Celebrations mark Independence Day around town

By B. B. Kaye



A veteran waves to the enthusiastic crowd at the Fourth of July parade. Photos B. B. Kaye

Thousands of people from Lamorinda and beyond, festively dressed in red, white and blue, strolled from the BART station and parking lots of businesses closed for Independence Day. Families set up folding chairs, couples chatted arm-in-arm, children ran excitedly, and teenagers staked out vantage points along walls and bleachers.

Early risers had enjoyed a pancake breakfast, served every year by the Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, at Orinda Library Plaza. Orinda Mayor Eve Phillips greeted the assemblage, the American flag was raised and National Anthem sung in ceremony, and Orinda's 33rd annual Fourth of July Parade and Celebration began.

This year's parade was declared "The Year of the Czechs," to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Orinda/Tabor Sister City Foundation, and so the Czech Republic flag and anthem were also honored. The U.S. Sister City Program was begun by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower, to nurture international friendship and cultural diversity.

Soon after opening ceremonies, runners met for the annual Haley's Run For A Reason, benefitting the Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood Foundation. As athletes started their five-mile run, the Friends of Orinda Library book sale opened at the library, and the streets filled with live jazz music.

The last of Haley's Runners came in, bleachers and streets lined with expectant faces, and the voices of Masters of Ceremony Steve Harwood and Scott Butler boomed out, introducing marchers as they came into view.

Flags and floating balloon arches framed the spectacle as veterans and Cub Scouts proudly led, followed by the airs and rumble of bagpipers and drummers in kilts. Police motorcycles purred, and the Moraga-Orinda Fire Department's massive new, brightly painted ladder truck rolled along, crew alert, monitoring radios even during this festive mission. Rescue dogs trotted with handlers, making friends with the littlest spectators. Marching bands exploded with the bright sound of trumpets, basso of tubas, and staccato and thump of drums.

Parade Marshals in traditional Czech clothing rode a Czech-themed float, and the East Bay Banjo Club played Czech favorites; small reminders that, not only are we an independent nation, but one composed of different cultures.

Elected officials beamed, and local civic groups and athletic teams presented on decorated floats and trucks, young passengers waving excitedly to curbside friends. A horse-and-wagon proceeded, reminding of days gone by, as did classic cars, from the era of high automobile art, polished chrome and fins, a glimpse of muscle in the grumbling idles. Children thrilled to beautiful dancers in circus dress on stilts bending gracefully to high-five onlookers, and the flashy undulations of a Chinese parade dragon mesmerized the crowd.

After the last marchers passed, revelers enjoyed Classic Rock, R&B, Motown, and funk at Orinda Theatre and in Orinda Park. Hungry people noshed on Thai food, ice cream, kettle corn, hot dogs, snow-cones and cold drinks, and engaged with exhibitors at booths filled with nature, science and civic activities for everyone.

The joy and freedom of such days is what Americans celebrate every year.



Boy Scouts and veterans led off the parade.

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