

RIVERSIDE: Festival of Lights kicks off

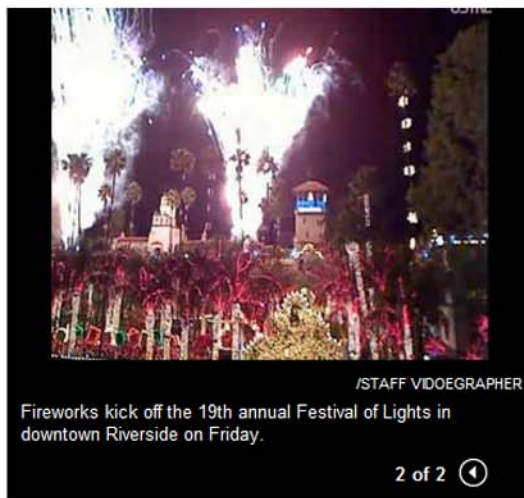
Festival features more than 3.6 million lights and 400 different characters decorating the Mission Inn



STAN LIM/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Lisa Nemetz, left, and Ami Flori, both of Riverside, enjoy the fireworks during the 19th Annual Festival of Lights Switch on Ceremony on Friday at the Mission Inn Hotel and Spa in Riverside.

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Fireworks kick off the 19th annual Festival of Lights in downtown Riverside on Friday.

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FROM STAFF REPORTS

Published: 25 November 2011 05:48 PM

Thousands of visitors cheered as the switch-on ceremony and fireworks show kicked off the 19th holiday season of Riverside's Festival of Lights on Friday evening.

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The cheers from those packed around the historic Mission Inn continued as every new burst of colorful fireworks lit up the downtown skies.



During the festival, the Mission Inn is decorated with more than 3.6 million lights and 400 different characters like the panda musicians on Main Street.

"It turned into something people can enjoy without spending any money," said Mission Inn Hotel and Spa owner Duane Roberts. "It's like Disneyland without paying for the tickets."

Roberts said he started the festival, which includes an ice skating rink, vendors, reindeer and photos with Santa Claus, as a way for him to give back to his hometown.