

Betsy Baxter Blondin – Introduction written for:
Fresno in Focus, hardcover, full-color book published by Imprint Publications, 2006

Introduction

Through the years, the City of Fresno has been celebrated as The Best Little City in the USA and designated as an All America City; and Fresno County has been called the Valley of Abundance and The Heartland. “Fresno,” the Spanish word for ash tree, was the name chosen for a tiny town site developing in the 1870s, which has since spread its early roots and matured into a thriving nexus of Central California.

Whatever the origin of the name, the nickname, or metaphor, Fresno is known today simply as home to nearly a half a million people. Close to a million people, estimated as representing 70 to 90 nationalities, now reside in the Greater Fresno metropolitan area.

A city can be known for its structures, physical features, and amenities, but a community is defined by its people. And Fresno is both a big city and a community. The ethnic diversity of its people as well as its variety of agricultural, industrial, manufacturing and service enterprises make it a most unique place.

Fresno has been ranked the No. 1 farm county in the United States and the world, but it is also the business, financial, cultural and entertainment center of the San Joaquin Valley. Located in the heart of California, it serves as a gateway to three national parks, Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon, and offers its own selection of entertainment and activities.

Visitors and residents enjoy arts, culture, and performances in Fresno, such as the Fresno Philharmonic Orchestra, the Fresno Ballet, the Grand Opera, the Good Company Players, and the Fresno Dance Repertory, many of which take place at the Fresno Convention & Entertainment Center. Local events and cultural celebrations include the Big Fresno Fair, Mexican Independence Day, the Great Taco Festival, the Hmong New Year, the Cesar Chavez Celebration, the Fresno Arts Council traditions, the Viva el Mariachi Festival, and Arte Americas.

Some places to visit and learn from are Fresno Metropolitan Museum, Fresno Art Museum, African-American Museum, Meux Home Museum, Fresno City and County Historical Society’s Kearney Mansion, Woodward Regional Park and the Shinzen Japanese Garden, Roeding Regional Park and the Chaffee Zoo, Forestiere Underground Gardens, Downing Planetarium at Fresno State, Fresno County Public Library, and Fresno Veterans Memorial Auditorium.

In addition, the Fresno County Blossom Trail in spring and the Fruit Trail in summer offer another opportunity to celebrate the agricultural foundation of the city and county.

Sports fans can be spectators of the Fresno Falcons at the Save Mart Center, the Heat Wave at the Selland Arena, Central Valley Coyotes arena football, Grizzlies AAA Baseball, local rodeos, and of course, the CSUF Bulldogs, or they can participate in many area sports and recreational activities. These include the many sports, such as baseball, soccer, football, karate and aquatics, offered by Fresno Parks, Recreation & Community Services at more than 50 parks and seven community centers. Fresno also boasts three municipal as well as several private golf courses. Table Mountain Casino is not only a place for fun and entertainment, but also exemplifies the success of the Western Mono and Chukchansi tribes.

For arts, entertainment, shopping and dining, the Tower District is a sophisticated cultural neighborhood marked by Fresno's well-recognized, historic 1894 Water Tower. The Farmer's Market and Fulton Street Mall downtown, as well as other area malls provide a plethora of retail and shopping opportunities.

The quality of life in Fresno is evidenced by the superior medical care available from many prestigious hospitals and organizations, religious and spiritual institutions, education facilities, and methods of transportation available.

Fresno Unified School District is the fourth-largest in California, and higher educational opportunities are offered at California State University Fresno (Fresno State), Fresno Pacific University, Fresno City College, Heald Business College, and Alliant International University.

Moving people and goods to and from and around Fresno is simplified by the airports, Fresno-Chandler and Fresno Yosemite International, the Santa Fe Railroad, area roads over which 200-plus area trucking companies haul goods, Amtrak train and Greyhound bus service.

The lifestyle of Fresno today combines rooted traditions and wholesome values, exemplified by the strength of the many businesses and organizations succeeding here for 75 years or longer, and the energy of its younger businesses, modern amenities, and the spirit of progress.

The images and profiles in this book are intended to provide a glimpse into the everyday life, culture, and spirit of Fresno, as well as its past, present, and future.

As it turns out, the ash tree for which Fresno was named may not have even been an ash tree, but the name now holds innumerable meanings for those who live here. From the many tribes of the Yokuts, who came here anywhere from 7,000 to 50,000 years ago, to today's multinational population, and from the strength of its agricultural foundation to its current agriculture and varied business climate, the community that is Fresno will always be defined by its people.