



Cruisin' Into Escondido's Heart.

Photos by Don Kay & Daniel Ingham.

In seven short years Cruisin' Grand has become not only the #1 car cruise in the nation, but more importantly, the heart of Escondido. Sure, it's where high-end hotrods cruise and park, and Discovery Channel stars and Eric Clapton stroll, but more importantly it's where local families come to spend a few hours, people meet up with friends, and neighbors run into each other. Cruisin' Grand has given people a reason to come downtown every week, and in the process they have rediscovered all that downtown has to offer: restaurants, stores, performance venues and professional offices.

It's widely known that Cruisin' Grand was Steve Waldron's idea. Steve used to cruise Valley Parkway on Friday and Saturday nights in the 70's. Later, he'd go to the T-Bird Diner and think what a shame it was that the hot rods were parked instead of cruising. He started to think that "Grand Avenue was an exceptional street to have a cruise on, a street with great ambiance." With the help of a few friends and the Escondido Promotions Commity and then CEO Suzanne Strassburger's support, we asked them if they would produce the event, which they said they would, if Steve would agree to be the car advisor. I, of course, became the default committee chair! A board was created and I met for months to work out the details. The Escondido Police Department quickly got on board and their support has been crucial to the success of Cruisin' Grand.



Friday at Cruisin' Grand on Grand Avenue in Escondido, CA. Randy Clark of Hot Rods & Custom Stuff, a sponsor, cruises down Grand Avenue in his flathead V8 powered '32 Ford roadster.

We talked the idea up at DBA mixers but in reality, none of us were really sure what to expect of the event. For weeks we counted parking spaces and cars on the street, trying to imagine how the event would impact the businesses. The Friday night before Cruisin' Grand started there were only 7 cars parked on the street between Center City Parkway and the hospital. But that was about to change...



While the DJ spins the tunes, kids at Cruisin' Grand show off their skills with the Hula-Hoop.

Opening night was April 7th, 2000. That week Steve called "everybody I knew with a hot rod. We made modest fliers that we handed to everybody. We had about 50-60 cars the first night! We were all amazed." For the first hour or so, every time staff or volunteers saw a hot rod in the distance, we were thrilled. But by 7pm, there were dozens of classic cars cruising up and down Grand, and it was like being transported back in time. As "Maybelline" and "Great Balls of Fire" were broadcast from under the marquee of the old Ritz Theater, Classic cars rumbled past, huge grins on the faces of their passengers, and as the DBA staff and DJ tried to keep dry in the steady drizzle, we knew we had a hit!



The cars kept coming, and so did the crowds. Attendance for the 2010 season was 200,000! With the support of local and regional sponsors, Cruisin' Grand has been able to expand to include theme nights, featured car clubs, special attractions, more awards, and live entertainment. Luckily, volunteers have repeatedly stepped forward to help with the increasing workload. The biggest surprise is, as Steve articulated, "the way the people of Escondido (the community, not necessarily car people), have supported the event. They come to look at the old cars, and to see Grand Ave." Paul Woolsey of The Yogurt Place says that "Cruisin' Grand has kept us here; without it we would have left. It's great!"



Steve Waldron MC's the nights Award Ceremony. Randy Clark, the sponsor for the nights cruise, presents an award to one of the "Best Car" winners for the August 4th, 2006, Cruisin' Grand.

Cruisin' Grand Doesn't Impact every business to the same extent, but all local businesses benefit from the increased positive exposure for Downtown Escondido. And Escondido has seen its historic downtown once again become the heart and soul of the community.

For more information, contact us at: info@cruisinggrandescondido.com