

Iranian-American Society of Marin County

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOTHING CLEANSSES YOUR MIND AND SOUL LIKE A NICE BON FIRE

Chahar Shanbeh Soori, The Festival of Fire

San Rafael, California - On the evening of March 13th, hundreds of Iranians and North Bay residents will be gathering at the beautiful McNears Beach Park in San Rafael, California to pay homage to the very ancient tradition of jumping over bon fires. They will be welcoming the arrival of the spring equinox and celebrating Chaharshanbeh Soori (char-shanbé-suri).

The event, organized by the Iranian American Society of Marin (IASM), has been celebrated here in Marin County for the past twelve years.

IASM will host the event on the last Tuesday night of the Persian calendar on March 13th, starts at 6:00 PM. Food and beverage vendors will provide delicious traditional foods and libations. Also, the event will have music and dance, and a supervised, dedicated area for jumping over the bonfires.

Chaharshanbeh Soori dates back to at least 1700 BCE, and is celebrated by Persians of all religions and ethnicities. Though Zoroastrian by origin, this festival of fire and Norooz (Persian New Year) which it preludes, is among the most socially important and festive cultural events for Iranians everywhere.

People of all ages and walks of life participate by jumping over bonfires whilst chanting "Take my cold, Give me your warmth". It is an opportunity to socialize, meet friends and make new ones. The rituals symbolize a cleansing of old and rejuvenation brought on by spring.

Back in Iran, kids start the festivities early in the evening by trick or treating. "We can't do that here", says Maryam Kafaii, the organizer of the event. "I think our neighbors would find it odd, if they saw kids trick or treating in March." She recalls, "as a child we used to bang a metal bowl with a spoon, signaling to the neighbors that we are at your door". This ritual is called "Ghashogh-zani", literally, hitting-spoons, still observed in every neighborhood in Iran.

Kafaii says, "I am so proud that so many American and others come and celebrate with us everywhere". Kafaii, who has lived in the US since 1977, is a fixture amongst the Iranian-American community in Marin County. "We are not a corporate group, a political group, a religious group, or even a social group. Just friends who want to preserve and share some of the really valuable aspects of our rich and ancient culture that has, over the years, been overwhelmed by current events".

San Rafael Fire and Police Departments, and the Marin County Parks and Recreation have been longstanding supporters of the event. In the years past, local dignitaries, politicians and the mayor of San Rafael have all honored the Iranian community with their presence and their show of support. Kafaii states "we have, forever, a sense of gratitude to the Marin County Parks Department for the continued help and support they have afforded us every year".

For more information about the event, visit <http://www.ipersian.org/chaharshanbeh-soori.html>

"Come and enjoy the fire, the food, the music and the beautiful views of the Bay".