

9-foot menorah to be lit in RWC

Tonight marks the first night of Hanukkah, and Redwood City will join in celebrating the eight-day Jewish festival of lights with the lighting of a nine-foot-tall menorah and other festivities this Thursday.

Chabad of Mid-Peninsula, a Jewish outreach organization, invites the public to Redwood City's Courthouse Square from 5:15 to 6:45 p.m. Thursday for complimentary latkes, gelt and jelly donuts, as well as music, dancing and other entertainment along with the candle-lighting ceremony at 5:45 p.m.

Dignitaries to be on hand

They'll be joined by local Jewish leaders and other officials, including Mayor Alicia Aguirre and state Sen. Joe Simitian. Broadway will be closed for the event.

"We're very excited," said Rabbi Levi Potash of Chabad. He said the organization is encouraging people to RSVP in advance at www.jewishredwoodcity.com/festival and that everyone who does so will be entered in a raffle to win a Flip video camera. Last year, the first that Redwood City had a Hanukkah Festival, 200 people attended.

Hanukkah is celebrated in homes with the lighting of the menorah every night. Courthouse Square will only have the menorah for one night, Potash said. That's because it's an oil-burning

menorah, which would be more hazardous to have lit every night. Next year the organization hopes to have an electric menorah so that it can have it up all eight days, he said. Since Thursday will be the third night of Hanukkah, three lights on the menorah will be lit.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in the second century B.C. following the small Jewish army's victory against the ruling Seleucid Empire, which sought to prevent the Jews from practicing their faith.

Potash said the message of the festival is relevant to everyone, not just Jews.

A fight for freedom

"They were fighting for their ability to practice their religion in a free society, which is very appropriate to celebrate here in America," he said. "The wider community can celebrate this expression of religious freedom and tolerance."

He said Hanukkah also celebrates the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil.

"We have a tradition in Judaism that a little bit of light expels much darkness," he said.

For more information, go to www.jewishredwoodcity.com/festival or call (650) 232-0995.