

## **Rachelle Hanna - Central Catholic High School**

### **What Does Rose Festival Mean to You?**

Rose City Reunion: A relatively ordinary phrase when initially heard. Most Portlandians are aware that Portland is nicknamed “Rose City,” but not too many are familiar with its symbolism. Meanwhile, reunion simply refers to a group of people gathering after a period of time away. When put together, this phrase holds a lot of meaning, symbolizing a loving event; a common goal; a light of hope. Heading almost two years into one of the most shocking eras in human history, “Rose City Reunion” holds more meaning than ever before.

The nickname “City of Roses” first came to fruition in 1889 through the Portland Rose Society. The organization was established by Georgianna Burton Pittock when she gathered all of her friends to look at her marvelous garden of roses. Her display inspired many to grow roses of their own, and soon, the popularity of roses in Oregon soared. Miles of rose-lined streets livened the Portland area, with former mayor Harry Lane declaring that Portland needed a “festival of Roses.” This inspired the first Rose Festival in 1907, which invited all Portlandians to unite as one to celebrate roses in Portland, and all the joy and color they brought along. The Rose Festival soon became an annual tradition, reuniting Portlandians each year.

Overtime, the Rose Festival has become more than an appreciation of Roses. It serves as a way for Portlandians to celebrate each other and the community they live in. It allows everyone to recognize and acknowledge the opportunities that Portland beholds, and remember the people who have and continue to fill the city with life and beauty. It inspires many to find ways to get involved with their city to help it prosper for years to come. However, the ongoing events that originated in 2020 did much damage to these opportunities.

The past two years have brought along uncertainty, shock, fear, anger, and violence. When plagued with such a heavy load of doubt and worry, it can become difficult to really appreciate the blessings bestowed upon us. I know this was the case for me many times. With school and event cancellations and broken promises, being asked to find the good even in the most terrible situations was a difficult task for me at times.

However, with this year being dubbed by many as the year of hope, I believe it is time to begin to realize our blessings, and for me, that starts with looking at the phrase “Rose City Reunion.”

The support I have received from my community brought me out of some of the hardest moments of my life. It’s their love that has encouraged me to try to keep on living. Though I knew that the future is uncertain, they have given me a route to retreat to should I need to fall back. With this in mind, “Rose City Reunion” serves as a call back to our roots. To reflect on what enlightened Portland in the first place. It wasn’t the miles of roses along the streets of Portland, but the people who planted them there in the first place. The people who held a love for their city and a desire to see it grow, to see it improve and do better.

Rose City Reunion: A relatively ordinary phrase when initially heard. Yet realizing the context of this phrase and its relevance to the city today, “Rose City Reunion” symbolizes the gathering of people to strengthen a city built from nothing. The gathering of people to strengthen a community built from love.