



Proclamation

- WHEREAS,** After upheaval in Southeast Asia in the 1970s–80s, hundreds of thousands of Lao refugees resettled worldwide, including in the United States, bringing with them a rich heritage and resilient spirit; and
- WHEREAS,** More than 50 years later, the Lao diaspora continues to demonstrate resilience, adaptation, and cultural endurance. Generations have grown here, communities have taken root, and Lao traditions continue to shape a vibrant identity--one that evolves while remaining grounded in its origins; and
- WHEREAS,** The Downtown Merced Lao New Year Celebration, revived in 2018, now serves as a central gathering for community cultural renewal. It reconnects the community with Lao heritage, providing opportunities to share history, deepen understanding, and invite the broader public to experience meaningful traditions; and
- WHEREAS,** Lao New Year, called Pii Mai Lao, follows the traditional solar calendar and is typically observed in mid-April. The festival marks the transition from the dry season to the monsoon and is also known as the Water Festival. It is a sacred time of renewal--washing away the past, offering blessings to elders, and beginning the new year with clarity, gratitude, and purpose; and
- WHEREAS,** In the United States, Lao New Year celebrations often extend into May, allowing communities like Merced to gather at meaningful times. The May 16th celebration reflects this extended season, bringing people together in shared cultural spirit and connection; and
- WHEREAS,** For Lao Americans, this celebration honors the opportunities found in the United States while affirming a continued commitment to cultural preservation. As new generations come of age, carrying forward language, customs, and values ensures that this heritage is not only remembered, but lived; and
- WHEREAS,** On May 16, 2026, the Lao community of Merced will host a downtown New Year celebration featuring cultural performances, traditional music, ceremonies, and the appearance of Nang Sangkhan--the New Year goddess symbolizing renewal and blessings--bringing the community together in a spirit of inclusion and shared celebration; and
- NOW, THEREFORE, I, MATTHEW SERRATTO, Mayor** of the City of Merced, on behalf of the City Council hereby recognizes the Lao New Year in Merced, and encourages the community to participate in the Downtown New Year Celebration on May 16, 2026.

Signed this 4th day of May 2026.

Matthew Serratto, Mayor of Merced