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Fruit and Veggie Fest Encourages Healthy Habits

Perris officials say the recent "Fruit and Veggie Fest" at Cardenas Market is a perfect example of what makes a great partnership. The City set up a booth in the market parking lot and handed out cookbooks full of healthy, low-calorie meals and desserts. A few steps away, other City staff provided information about the upcoming Tour de Perris bicycle rides and a 5-kilometer power walk. Riverside County Department of Public Health served hundreds of cups of water flavored by cucumbers and strawberries to thirsty shoppers making their way in and out of Cardenas. And a personal trainer led her students through a series of sweat-building calorie-burning exercises. Inside the market, City Manager Richard Belmudez, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley and Cardenas Marco Robles talked about ways to make Perris healthier through smart food choices and healthy alternatives, which the supermarket is committed to increasing. He said the store is developing healthy food choices for youngsters to senior citizens.

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Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez, Cardenas corporate spokesman Marco Robles, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, City of Perris staff member Michelle Ogawa and Riverside County Department of Public Health nutrition education specialist Claudia Pelayo at the May 9 "fruit and veggie fest" in Perris.

"Cardenas is committed to addressing the health concerns of our community through education and by increasing fat-free foods and other healthy alternatives," Robles said. "We are committed to educating the community at the store where it starts by choosing quality produce and fat-free alternatives."

Robles said the City of Perris has "been a wonderful partner" in spreading the healthy-choice message through its Live Well Perris program that encourages smarter food alternatives and physical activity. Belmudez said programs like Live Well work well because of the City's partnerships.

"We are very happy to work with Cardenas and Riverside County on important events like this fruit and veggie fest," he said. "They are great partners and we appreciate their support. Cardenas is a major stakeholder in the Perris region and it's nice to see them giving back so generously to the community."



Perris City employee Lupe Acosta hands out cookbooks to visitors at the fruit and veggie fest.

Ashley said he has never seen a City so committed to informing its residents about the need to eat healthy and exercise. Since its creation in 2013, the City has sponsored two community health fairs attended by thousands of residents, taken part in several activities like the May 9 fruit and veggie fest, organized dozens of workouts on weekends and evenings in Perris parks, hosted walks, hikes and the Tour de Perris bicycle rides and will be sponsoring a series of sports clinics like the one May 17 at Mercado Park that highlights boxing basics. That clinic, hosted by Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers, begins at 10 a.m. and features sparring matches, jump-roping, shadow boxing and other skills used by pugilists. Bicycles, boxing gloves and athletic equipment will be raffled off and boxing champion Mikey Garcia will be on hand to sign autographs.



Personal trainer Laura Sosa leads an exercise group who put on a demonstration watched by hundreds at the May 9 fruit and veggie fest.

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough will lead a May 31 hike at the Lake Perris State Recreation Area. That event begins at 9 a.m. Bernasconi Camp Entrance off Ramona Expressway.

Ashley said the number and variety of Live Well Perris events offers something for everyone.

"This program continues to build strength," Ashley said. "It's important to make good choices in what you eat or drink. It affects your physical health and your well-being for life. You are what you eat. If you eat well, you will be well."

Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez also expressed support for events like the fruit and veggie fest and thanked the City's partners for their support.

"We are coming together to promote healthy eating habits throughout our community," he said.



Dennis Gutierrez, of the Inland Empire Hispanic Leadership Council, along with Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez, City Manager Richard Belmudez and Cardenas markets spokesman Marco Rubio at the fruit and veggie fest.

Those habits are needed because many Perris residents are disadvantaged and have limited access to healthy foods and cooking techniques, said Claudia Pelayo, a nutrition-education specialist at the Riverside County Department of Public Health. Better education can reduce obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol and high-blood pressure, she said. To encourage healthy eating, the county is sponsoring gardening workshops and distributing cookbooks.

"We are pleased to be working with the City of Perris on this important health-related program," she said.



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