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## Perris Residents Improve Their Skills at Boxing Clinic

Hundreds of people descended on Mercado Park May 17 to take part in and support a boxing-skills clinic, the first of a series of sports camps hosted by Perris elected officials as part of the City's continuing "Live Well" health initiative.

Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers, who hosted the clinic, said the event allowed kids and teen-agers the chance to learn self-defense and improve their self-esteem while getting the chance to meet boxing champion Mikey Garcia, who appeared at the event to sign autographs. Most importantly, Rogers said, it was a chance to exercise, burn calories and throw a punch against obesity, diabetes and other health-issues plaguing young people.

"Let's knock out these conditions that keep us from living a full and active life!" Rogers told the crowd. "Thanks for coming out here today to support our Live Well Perris program and thanks for your commitment to healthy eating and active living. You're going to have a lot of fun. Enjoy the day!"

By day's end, 148 residents ages 4 to 70 had signed up to participate in the skills competition, which included jump-roping, throwing a medicine ball, shadow boxing and drills to improve footwork and balance. Amateur boxers from the City-sponsored P-Town Combat Sports Academy took part in a series of sparring matches.

In addition to the skills contestants, the crowd included many parents and grandparents who came out to support their youngsters and learn more about upcoming Live Well Perris events, like a May 31 hike at the Lake Perris State Recreation Area that will be led by City Councilman Mark Yarbrough.



Jasmine Arsola, 9, jumps rope during a boxing skills competition held May 17 at Mercado Park, part of the ongoing Live Well Perris health initiative.

Rogers said she is heartened that many people have taken the message of Live Well Perris to heart. They are working out at the City gym, walking through their neighborhoods, riding one of the many bicycles the City has raffled off in recent weeks and eating more fruits and vegetables. A lifelong fan of boxing, Rogers met legends Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson as a young girl and counts those champions among her friends. She grew up in New York, often visiting Madison Square Garden and Atlantic City to watch boxing matches.

"Boxing is a great sport," she told the audience.

Perris City Councilman Al Landers said he is pleased the boxing skills clinic focused on getting youngsters to exercise.

"We owe it as members of the City Council and as concerned residents to provide ways for our young people to live healthier and more active lives," Landers said. "This is a great example of that spirit. I am really glad to take part in this event that's focused on our children."



Boxing champion Mikey Garcia is flanked by supporters and organizers of the Boxing Skills Clinic: Andre Mitchell, co-founder of the P-Town Combat Sports Academy, Perris City Councilman Al Landers, Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers and Angel Ochoa, who supervises daily activities at P-Town.

The appearance of Garcia, the WBO super featherweight, created quite a stir as long lines of people waited to get his autograph and purchase t-shirts and other memorabilia. In his comments to the crowd, Garcia said three qualities make a champ: "lots of hard work, patience and dedication."

"You don't become a champion overnight," Garcia said, then added a message of support to all those participating in the skills camp: "I actually admire you a lot."

That message struck home with many of the young prospective boxers.

Leticia Jimenez, 18, said she's trained at P-Town for two years. She said she enjoys learning self defense, getting in shape that boxing requires and meeting new friends while training. Boxing keeps the 550 or so P-Town members occupied and out of trouble.

"You learn how to be respectful and how to have fun,"

Jimenez, a Citrus Hill High School senior, said of her training time at P-Town. Jimenez is planning to study pharmacology at CalState Fullerton with plans of becoming a pharmacist. She said she enjoys living in Perris because it is "a great community that is generous, helpful and friendly."



The day's activities included spirited sparring matches, like the one taking place between two competitors in a ring set up at Mercado Park.

Izack Ramirez, 15, a Perris High School sophomore, said he's built up his self-confidence since joining the P-Town family. He spars regularly at the training center.

"I want to get better," Izack said. "I'd like to make boxing a career."

Sentiments like those bring smiles to Andre Mitchell and Angel Ochoa, who helped found P-Town and in addition to teaching boxing skills, the academy also instructs youngsters from 7 to 18 years of age about football, martial arts and provides tutoring and homework assistance to students enrolled in its various programs.



Youngsters throw medicine balls as part of the May 17 boxing skills clinic at Mercado Park, sponsored by the City of Perris and hosted by Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers.

Mitchell works as a fugitive tracker for the Los Angeles Police Department, a job that takes him all over the country. In the course of his work, he has encountered many young men without fathers or positive role models who turn to lives of crime. His passion for working with youngsters is driven by a determination to keep them out of the criminal justice system. Mitchell and the City of Perris have partnered for 10 years to create football, boxing and martial-arts programs.

"We could not do what we do without the help and cooperation of the City of Perris," Mitchell said. "Teaming up with the City has made this community a better place."

Ochoa said the City's commitment to working with youth is never more clear than when it sponsors events like the skills clinic.

"The City and P-Town are on the same page," he said. "We are committed to keeping our youngster on the right path through hard work, studying and staying off the streets and out of gangs," Ochoa said. "In those efforts, the City of Perris has been our shoulder."

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