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Perris Officials Present PALA Awards



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch (far right) with students who completed the Presidential Active Living Award (PALA) challenge. In front of Busch is Administrative Services Manager Isabel Carlos while Assistant City Manager Ron Carr stand among the recipients honored at the July 8 City Council meeting.

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Perris officials gave a public shout-out to more than 20 elementary school students who improved their lives by exercising regularly and eating fruits, vegetables and whole-grains and nixing soda, cookies and chips.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch presented each student with a Presidential Active Living Award (PALA) at the start of the July 8 City Council meeting, which recognized the efforts of youngsters at Railway Elementary School and Innovative Horizons Charter School.

The campuses were selected as part of the "Chef in the Classroom" program that let the students observe first-hand how to make healthy snacks like fruit smoothies and learn the benefits of eating healthy foods.

As part of the exercise component of the PALA award, each student had to complete at least an hour of physical activities five times a week over the course of six weeks.

Reaching out to youngsters and teen-agers is a big part of the ongoing Live Well Perris health campaign. City officials say they are concerned that too many adolescents spend too much time in front of the television or playing computer games instead of taking part in exercises like bicycling, walking, running and participating in organized sports. As a result, more than 40 percent of children in the City are overweight or obese and can easily fall victim to diabetes, high-blood pressure and other chronic conditions.

City officials say they are pleased with the results of the Chef-in-the-Classroom program and are expanding their Live Well Perris campaign with more kid-friendly events. Those include an aquatics day July 11 at the Drop Zone water park, a baseball clinic in August, a soccer-skills camp in September and a power walk and family-oriented bicycle ride as part of the Oct. 4 Tour De Perris cycling event.

Smiles were everywhere as each student was called to the podium for a picture and handshake with the Mayor, who invited parents to come forward and grab a picture of their kids holding their PALA certificates. Afterwards, in remarks on the Council dais, Busch told the audience that he and City administrators earlier visited the two schools and ate lunch with the PALA recipients.

"It was a pleasure to visit the schools and talk to our students," Busch said. "It was great fun."

The City partnered with the Perris Elementary School District and the non-profit group THINK (Teaching, Helping, Inspiring & Nurturing Kids) for the PALA project. Erin Brinker, executive director of the Inland Empire chapter of THINK, said publicly acknowledging their accomplishment will stay with them for years.

"How special is it to get to shake hands with the Mayor while your parents are watching?" she said. "That kind of acknowledgement is big. It reinforces their commitment and positive behavior."

Brinker said the City of Perris went "above and beyond" while working with her group.

"We are very grateful for the City of Perris support in providing this program," she said. "It shows that we are all in support of our children."

Perris Assistant City Manager Ron Carr, who organized the Live Well program last year, said the PALA program has been well-received by residents determined to take control of their lives by eating better and exercising. Response from the Perris community has been strong, and that reinforces the City's commitment to continuing its Live Well program.

"When we first conceived of Live Well Perris, we wanted to do a mobile AP for people to track their fitness activities," he said.

"We started getting quotes and found out that developing the AP we wanted was going to cost in excess of \$30,000. We almost gave up on an AP and then I remembered the President's Challenge from back when I was a kid. It turned out that this program was still out there and now it was web-based. And Free. We publicized how to sign up and the response has been great. We currently have more than 400 participants in the PALA challenge. It's never too late to sign up and you can do that at www.presidentschallenge.org."



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