



Brisk and Breezy for Walk to School Day

The weather was cold and blustery but the atmosphere was cheery and bright for the 200 students and their supporters who walked to Perris High School en masse Wednesday morning.

The stroll through Downtown Perris took participants in the International Walk to School Day past Victorian-era houses, new apartments and heavily used play areas before the half-mile jaunt ended at the campus.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough, City Councilman Julio Rodriguez and City Clerk Nancy Salazar headed up the contingent of elected officials who took part in the walk. Also present were Perris police and fire department representatives and members of the City staff.

International Walk to School Day is a global event that involves communities from more than 40 countries walking and biking to school on the same day as part of promoting a healthier lifestyle.

Perris officials say they are happy to support events like Wednesday's walk, since it continues the City's hugely successful Live Well Perris initiative, which is all about exercising and eating healthy. Live Well Perris began in June with a community health fair, continued with a series of exercise sessions, walks and hikes featuring elected officials, included a "biggest loser" weight-loss competition and wraps up with a series of four Winter Workouts that begin Oct. 12 (subsequent sessions are Oct. 29, Nov. 9 and Nov. 23) and a walk down historic D Street on Oct. 19.

City workers partnered with the Perris Elementary School District to plan the local International Walk to School Day event.

Salazar brought her 2-year-old daughter, Khloe, along for the morning walk.

"I think it's great to walk with these children and support this wonderful event," Salazar said. "It's something healthy and it's great to do."

Salazar and Rodriguez led a group of about 150 students, parents, teachers and school staff members and administrators who walked from Mercado Park to Perris Elementary School. Mayor Pro-Tem Yarbrough led another 50-person contingent that began walking from Rotary Park to the A Street Perris Elementary School campus.

Principal Eric Rivera was among the pedestrians. He praised the City for sponsoring the Live Well initiative, which the campus has taken to heart. Each morning, students walk 15 to 20 minutes around the playground before the start of classes.

"It gets the blood going and the oxygen flowing," Rivera said.

About Wednesday's walk, Rivera said: "The participation was greater than we expected. The support we got from the City, police and fire was awesome. A big shout-out to the City of Perris for its commitment to encourage students to live healthy lives."

Pals Sihaya Heru and Ayana Bourgeois, both 10, said the weather was a challenge but the walk was worth the effort. They were among the students who created posters and signs for the walk, placards that read "Walking is Fun" and "We Walk to School." Students got a police escort to the school campus.

"We can all walk together and walking is great fun," Sihaya said. "The weather was cold. My hands are freezing!" Ayana said she combated the chill by putting on not one, but two jackets.

"It's great to meet in a park, see your friends and walk to school," she said.

Plenty of parents arrived before sunrise to walk with their children. Those included Emma Guevara, who walked with daughter, Aimee, 8.

"She woke up early, she got me up," Guevara said. "She was very excited. Whatever makes her happy makes me happy."

Yarbrough and Rodriguez congratulated the students, parents and educators who made Wednesday's walk possible.

"This is what our healthy living program is all about," Yarbrough said. "It's great that we are taking it to the schools. The weather was a little threatening but we got here. It's important for kids to know that we care and that are willing to lead by example. These kids are our future."

Rodriguez said he was more than pleased by the large turnout.

"It's incredibly exciting to join in and participate in this kind of event," he said. "We have showed everyone that we can walk to school. It's healthy and it's important."



Perris Elementary School children created posters and banners as part of the International Walk to School Day. Here a group of children walks from Mercado Park to the campus about half-a-mile away.



Fifth-graders Ayana Bourgeois and Sihaya Heru, both 10, are all smiles after completing the walk.



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough walks with about 50 students and parents who made the trek from Rotary Park to Perris Elementary School.



Perris City Clerk Nancy Salazar carries daughter, Khloe, 2, while walking with City Councilman Julio Rodriguez.