



Perris Press Release

Contact: Joe Vargo, Perris Public Information Officer
Phone: 951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Perris Teens Learn Life Lessons at Rotary Leadership Camp

The Perris Valley high school students said at first they were a little shy, a tad bit nervous, not quite sure of themselves.

They didn't quite know what to expect when they arrived during a snowstorm at a youth leadership camp in Crestline, courtesy of the Rotary Club of Perris.

What followed was an intense weekend of intense discussions with other high-school juniors from Southern California, exercises in interpersonal communications and teambuilding skills and hands-on participation in projects to help underprivileged families.

The teen-agers said they came away with a greater appreciation of the challenges faced and overcome by their peers—including family disillusion, physical abuse, drug addiction and school bullying.

The Perris teens used words like "life-changing," "moving" and "inspirational" to describe last weekend's Rotary Youth Leadership Awards experience.

"I learned to be more confident in myself, that there's no reason to be shy or scared around other people," said Jose Marin, 16, who attends California Military Institute and plans on becoming either an anesthesiologist or firefighter.

Those thoughts were echoed by Vince Vanterpool, 16, who attends Heritage High School. From the moment the teen-agers arrived at Thousand Pines Christian Camp and Conference Center, they knew they were in for three-days of intense discussion mixed in between snowball fights and games like "Lego-a-Go-Go."

The former included conversations about problems confronting high-school students today like drugs on campus to depression to worries about jobs and the future. These "culture walk" conversations invited comments from all participants, some who said the discussions provided their first platform to airing challenges and problems they face at home and the classroom. The latter entailed building an exact replica of a Lego car without ever seeing the original. They had to create a replica by following verbal descriptions of the original. Vanterpool said his group "got close" to the original.

"The leadership camp inspired me to do better," he said.

Vanterpool said he wants to start a program to send care packages to American troops overseas.

Other Perris-area teens took part in Rotary's "Kids Against Hunger" program by packing 21,000 meals that will be distributed to deserving recipients in San Bernardino County. The meals consist of rice, soy products and vegetables like carrots.

"I thought it was really cool," said Cristian Velasquez, 17, who goes to Rancho Verde High School. "I think it was one of the best programs I've ever taken part in."

Marin, Vanterpool, Velasquez and Sarah Wilson, 17, from Citrus Hill High School and Marc Pinedo, 17, from Heritage High School were recognized Thursday by the Rotary Club of Perris for participating in the youth leadership experience. Perris Rotary members paid the \$385 per camper fee to cover the costs of the weekend retreat.

Perris Rotary President Vince Agnifili said the weekend is designed to build self-confidence, gain exposure to a variety of issues and people, meet active community leaders and learn valuable information and career skills. Ultimately, Rotarians would like to see campers become youth and even community leaders.

"The camp shows our commitment to youth in our community," Agnifili said. "It's a great opportunity for these young men and women. They are already great kids and when they return, they come back even stronger and better kids."



The Rotary Club of Perris hosted a breakfast for the teen-agers who recently completed a weekend leadership retreat in Crestline. Left to right Rotary President Vince Agnifili welcomes Vince Vanterpool, Cristian Velasquez, Jose Marin, Marc Pinedo and Sarah Wilson. Rotarian Mike Behrens is pictured on the extreme right.



High school students Jose Marin, Vince Vanterpool, Sarah Wilson, Cristian Velasquez and Marc Pinedo at the Rotary breakfast. Rotarian Mike Behrens is pictured second from right.