



# Perris Press Release

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## Kids are Key to Enchanted Heights Outreach Success

For more than a year, the children of Enchanted Heights became walking billboards spreading information about the City's desire to bring a new sewer system to their disadvantaged community.

Elementary and middle-school youngsters passed out flyers explaining the need for sewers to replace leaking septic tanks, answered questions about the project, encouraged their parents and neighbors to attend public hearings and advocated on its behalf.

The children's enthusiasm for the project spread to their moms and dads, schoolmates, friends and neighbors, who eventually threw their whole-hearted support behind the project, which is progressing ahead of schedule and racing toward completion in mid-2013. The City worked with Eastern Municipal Water District, Riverside County, the California Department of Public Health and the State Water Resources Control Board to obtain the necessary \$15-million in grants to build a new sewer system at no cost to residents in the 446-Enchanted Heights residences.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and Assistant City Manager Ron Carr presented several Enchanted Heights children with certificates of appreciation during the City Council meeting this week for their diligence and commitment. The children also picked up goody bags featuring City of Perris pens, water bottles, notepads and radios.

Enchanted Heights children Santiago Ceja, 13; his sister, Monica Ceja, 11, and Analinda Heredia, 13, were all smiles as they accepted the kudos from the Mayor and City administrators.

"Our outreach effort took place over several phases but the children were always supportive," Busch said. "They made it come together and we appreciate their efforts on our behalf."

Carr told the audience that Enchanted Heights became a success story because the City realized that "it was not just a sewer project but a community outreach effort."

Because many



Perris consultant Maria Elena Kennedy with Enchanted Heights children Santiago Ceja, 13; Monica Ceja, 11, and Analinda Heredia, 13, outside of Perris City Hall.



Enchanted Heights youngsters Monica Ceja, 11, and her brother, Santiago, 13, receive Certificates of Appreciation for their support of the new sewer project for their community. With them are Assistant City Manager Ron Carr, Perris consultant Maria Elena Kennedy and Mayor Daryl Busch.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and consultant Maria Elena Kennedy with Enchanted Heights resident Analinda Heredia, who helped make the community's sewer project a success.

Enchanted Heights residents speak only limited English and initially appeared reluctant to support the project, it became critical for the City to enlist Spanish-speaking consultant Maria Elena Kennedy, who befriended Enchanted Heights residents and persuaded them to let their children become major players in the outreach effort.

Kennedy said the City's grass-roots approach marks a striking contrast to many other attempts at public outreach in disadvantaged communities. Those often involve holding one or more public hearings conducted by distant bureaucrats who don't visit the affected neighborhoods and lack the communications skills to build local support.

With the success of Enchanted Heights, the City's approach to public outreach and education is being hailed at the state and federal levels as a model for other agencies to follow, Kennedy said. Perris has been honored with by the League of California Cities with its top award—the Helen Putnam Award for Excellence—and by the Municipal Managers Association of Southern California for its Enchanted Heights outreach.

"It involves ordinary people advocating on their own behalf," Kennedy said. "It is heartening to see the kids of Enchanted Heights engage and become active participants in the outreach effort."

Santiago Ceja, who attends the California Military Institute, said the new sewers will ease public health concerns caused when septic tanks flooded and spilled raw sewage on Enchanted Heights streets.

"It will reduce pollution," he said. "I had a lot of fun helping hand out flyers. I got to explore my community, get to know my community better, and see how it has improved."

Monica Ceja, who attends Pinacate Middle School, said leaking septic tanks created foul-smelling odors near her home. Those soon will be gone throughout all of Enchanted Heights.

Analinda Heredia, a student at the New Horizons Charter School, thanked the City of Perris for its commitment to her community.

"The City helped us, and they should be proud of the job they did," she said.