



## Community Garden Grows at Railway Elementary

Many hands made quick work as they pulled weeds, carried soil and mulch to planters and prepared a community garden for students at Railway Elementary School and the Rob Reiner Children & Families Center School in the City's south side last week.

The City of Perris contributed to the project, donating bags of mulch, rakes and shovels that helped prepare to gardens, which soon will be planted with radishes, pumpkins, sunflowers and carrots. It's all part of a school project to teach elementary school children how seeds grow into plants while encouraging them to use resources carefully and treat the environment with respect.

"This would not have been possible without assistance from the City of Perris," said Charlene Busch, a teacher at Railway who helped coordinate the green-thumb effort. "We are very grateful for their support. The kids are so excited and we haven't even planted a seed yet."

Major funding for the garden came from the Perris Rotary, which donated \$3,000 to purchase the garden beds.

Parents and children worked side-by-side to prepare the garden, taking shovels and rakes to weeds, wheel-barrowing mulch and fertilizer to the wooden planters and smoothing over the dirt. Seeds will be planted in the next few days and quick-growing crops like radishes will be ready for harvesting before the end of the school year.

School officials hope that parents and their children will keep the garden in good order during the summer and harvest the crops that take longer to grow.

Students said they liked the idea of planting food to eat, learning about how plants grow and studying the environment.

"We can help the earth and we can have a garden," said Brandon Erickson, 10, a fourth-grader at Railway. Vania Trejo, 9, another fourth-grader, said she was glad to help out too.

"We get to plant some vegetables, which are healthy for you," she said. "It's fun to build the garden."

The work was hot and dusty, and some Railway students got their school clothes soiled. Ariana Love, 9, said it was all part of the fun.

"Planting is my hobby, I have my own garden at home," she said. "I like to get dirty. It's fun."

There were plenty of parents on hand to lend moral and physical support. After about an hour of digging, pulling and tilling, the planter boxes were good to go.

Lourdes De Alba said she was there to support her son, Ivan, 9, on the project.

"It's important for children to learn how things grow," she said. "I like this project because the kids get to work with the earth." Denice Romo worked beside her two children, Renee, 9, and Monica, 7.

"I think it's important for children to grow up thinking about the environment," she said. "It's important for all kids, not just my kids."

Teacher Shawn Ross praised the hard work and dedication of the students, some who have worked for weeks planning the school garden.

"It's been fun for the kids," Ross said. "They've worked on it for a while, starting it from scratch."



Railway Elementary School teacher Charlene Busch lugs a bag of mulch for the community garden begun with the help of school students.



Brandon Erickson, 10, grimaces as he carries a bag of mulch to the garden.



Marina Salcido, 10, and Lana Erickson, 12, shovel dirt to prepare the garden.



Ivan De Alba, 9, concentrates as he scoops dirt into a planter box.