



## Perris News

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### Over 500 Perris Kids Participate in Summer Aquatics Program

Every day, the pollywogs, guppies, pikes, minnows, eels and fish hit the water at the Perris High School aquatics center, eager to improve their strokes, ability to float and gain more confidence when they leave solid ground for the swimming pool.

The names belong to the various levels youngsters enroll in as they go from often-frightened beginners to accomplished swimmers.

The Perris aquatics program has expanded this summer, even during the tough economy.

More than 500 children will take swimming and water polo lessons this summer, thanks in part to private and government grants to help pay for the instruction. Many students receive full scholarships, paying nothing out of pocket for the instructions.

"It's a huge community service, both for the students and those who are teaching the lessons," said Charlene Busch, a community advocate who has worked for years to bring an aquatics center to Perris. "These are skills that will serve people for life."

Busch said that there's more than having fun behind the swimming lessons.

Each year in the U.S., about 6,500 people drown, and statistics show children under 5 and teen-agers between 14 and 19 are at the greatest risks. That's why for the first time, swimming lessons will be taught during physical education classes in Perris when classes resume later in August.

"It's a tragedy that can be prevented," she said.

Come to the Perris High School any morning and a visitor will see toddlers floating on their back, kindergartners practicing free-style strokes and elementary students jumping in the pool under the watchful eyes of teen-age instructors. Afternoon sessions take place for aspiring water-polo players. Rosa Vera brings her 6-year-old son Alexander for daily lessons.

"I love this program," she said. "He's learning not to be afraid of going in the swimming pool. He's very excited about coming here. He loves being here. He's doing very well."

Resident Toni Rodart said she thought the tough times would result in the suspension of the swimming program this summer. She said she's delighted to see it continue and expand. Her 5-and-a-half year old son, Wyatt, goes through his own ritual every morning, one that includes a checklist of everything he'll need when he gets to the pool.

"He asks, 'Mom, where's my swimsuit? Where's my towel? Can you put on suntan lotion so I don't get crispy?'" Rodart said. "When he first started, he did not know how to swim. I was concerned because my mom has a pool. Now I know he will be able to get out of the pool if he needs to."

Rodart praised City aquatics director Cynthia Quintero and her staff, calling them "great, patient, understanding, incredible."

"We are very grateful to have this program," she said. Wyatt Rodart climbed out of the pool this week and announced a new milestone in his swimming career.

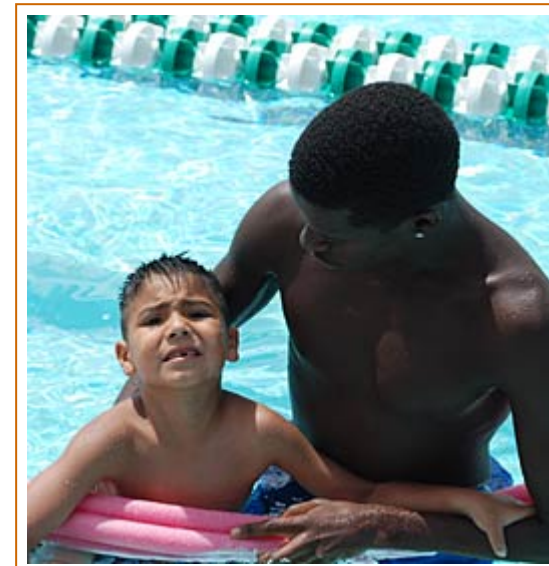
"I kept my eyes open under water," he said. "I am learning to swim like a fish!"

Quintero said she's pleased the City continues its water-safety and recreation programs in this economy. The programs provide \$9 and \$10 an hour jobs for the instructors and give them valuable experience in the job market. But the aquatics programs save lives too, she said.

"I am so pleased to know that we are helping keep children alive," she said.

"We are privileged to have a forward thinking city such as Perris as a partner in showing residents, contractors and other municipalities that there is a better way to water," said Mike Baron, Toro's National Specification and Sales Manager.

**See a short video...**



Jordan Lewis Lewis gives support for a youngster learning the basics.



Instructor Nick Sbardellati gives some pointers to young swimmers before they enter the water at Perris High School.



Wyatt Rodart is all smiles as instructor Elizabeth Gonzales shows him how to float on his back. Wyatt is one of about 500 Perris youngsters taking advantage of the City's aquatics and water polo programs.