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## 16th Satellite Garden Unveiled at Val Verde Elementary School



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PERRIS, Calif. (September 5, 2019) -- The City of Perris dedicated its 16th "satellite community garden" at Val Verde Elementary School on September 4, 2019, achieving another milestone in its efforts to bring healthy food choices and options to its residents.

"What is unique about this is that the school has dedicated sixth grade first period to taking care of this garden," said Mayor Michael M. Vargas, one of the dignitaries at the ribbon cutting. "This is the first school to dedicate an entire class to this program and I believe the students will benefit from that."

Perris Council Member Malcolm Corona, Perris City Council Member Marisela Magana, City Manager Richard Belmudez, Assistant City Manager Isabel Carlos, Community Services Director Sabrina Chavez were in attendance, as well as representatives from Assembly Member Jose Medina's office of the 61st District and representatives from the office of Senator Richard Roth of the 31st district and City's Public Health team.



The short ceremony was live streamed from the City's Facebook page and featured speakers such as Perris Mayor Michael Vargas, Assistant Superintendent Mark Lenoir, Val Verde Elementary School Principal Dr. Fernando Betanzos and the garden's champion and teacher at Val Verde Elementary Joe Espinoza

Assistant Superintendent Mark Lenoir shared a few words about how this is more than just a garden.

"We are not just talking about gardens. We are talking about the future of these children," said Lenoir. "We are on board with the mayor and the City's vision to become one of California's healthiest cities."



The 16th satellite garden at Val Verde Elementary School marks an important milestone for Perris officials. After unveiling a community garden at the City Hall Campus, the Grow Perris initiative has passed the halfway point of their mission to establish 30 other gardens throughout the City.

"We are more than halfway to our goal of 30 gardens and I am very excited about that," said Corona. "There were a lot of people involved and I want to say congratulations to everyone for getting this garden completed."

Currently, there are more than 30 partners in the Grow Perris initiative, with the goal of building 30 gardens. The partners include representatives from all three school districts in Perris and other community organizations and leaders.



Teacher Joe Espinoza partnered with Perris staff and the Grow Perris team to champion the garden, wanting to get the children active and involved with healthy living.

"The idea was to get the children outside and teach them about health and about living a healthy lifestyle" said Espinoza. "We wanted them to get their hands dirty and take something from seed to harvest. We are proud of this project."

This is the sixth garden established in the Val Verde Unified School district and the first school to implement horticulture into the class schedule.



Espinoza applied for the Grow Perris Initiative after Val Verde staff decided to revive a previous garden that had deteriorated. After an initial assessment by Perris City staff, the decision was made to relaunch the garden.

Espinoza was also able to implement one raised bed per grade level of students, which helps to incorporate the entire elementary, rather than just Espinoza's class.

Espinoza attended a Grow Perris partnership meeting in fall 2018 and then applied for the grant, and after a short delay, broke ground in February 2019. The garden took approximately six months to complete and received assistance from community volunteers, Futures Farmers of America from Heritage High School and Perris City Staff. Staff and volunteers created a garden containing tomatoes, onions, bell peppers, romaine lettuce, corn, strawberries, radishes, fruit trees and a combination of summer squash.



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