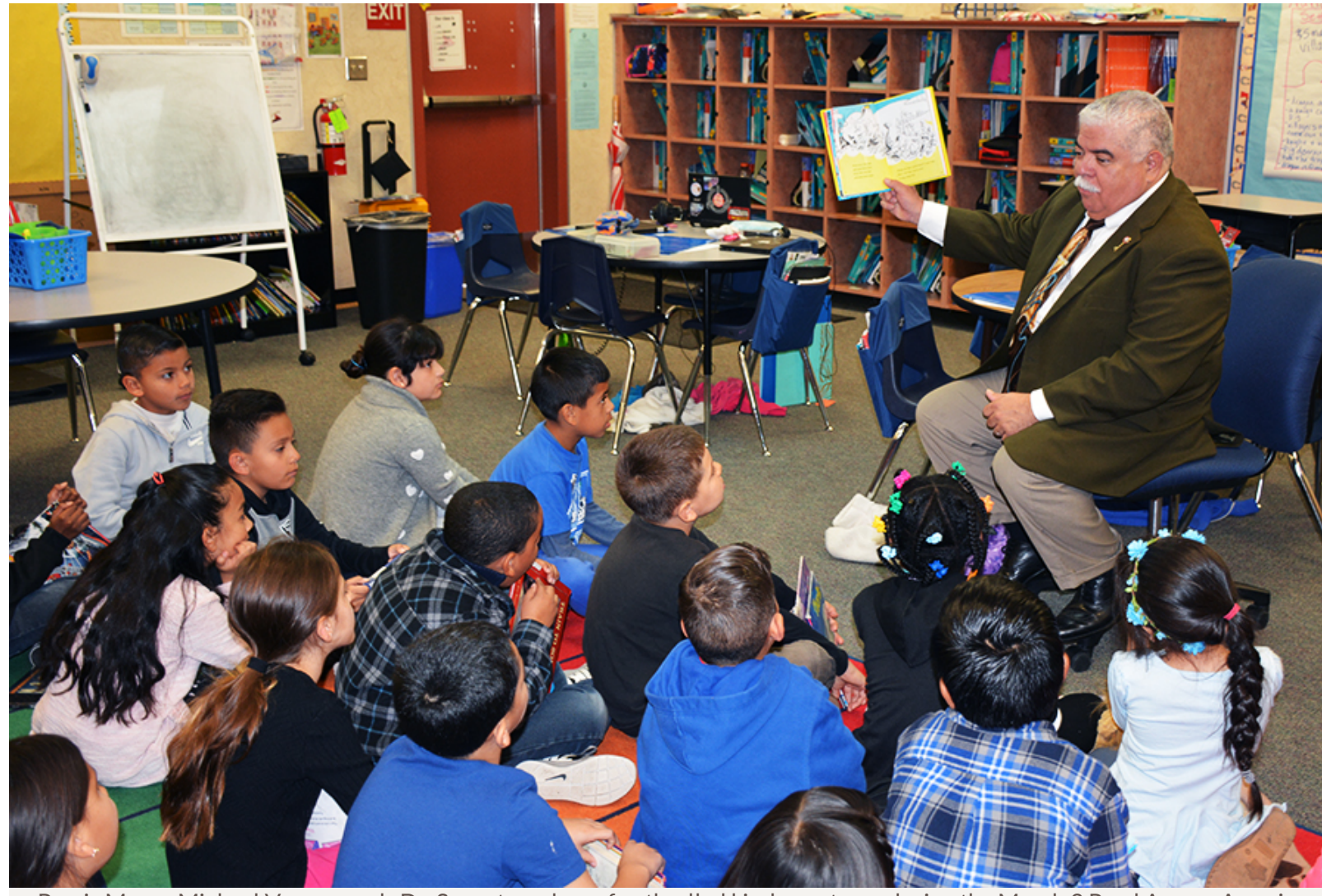




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Mayor Vargas and Councilwoman Burke Become "Principal for a Day"



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas reads Dr. Seuss to a class of enthralled kindergartners during the March 2 Read Across America event.

Media Contact

Joe Vargo
Public Information Officer
951-943-6100
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas and City Councilwoman Tonya Burke set aside their normal municipal duties March 2 and went back to school.

First the pair became instructors to elementary school children, cracking open various Dr. Seuss books and reading them as part of the national celebration of the famed author's birthday.

Then they swapped hats and took on the duties of an administrator. They became Principal for a Day.

"This is a great opportunity to get out into the schools and talk to teachers and students," said Vargas, who read at three different schools. "A lot of these kids look up to us as role models and it's a big thing for them to see us in their classroom. It also encourages them to read to improve their literacy. And it's a lot of fun!"

Burke said she "truly enjoys reading" as part of Dr. Seuss day. She read to her own children when they were growing up and found the experience rewarding and inspiring.

"It's good for children to see we care about them and their education," she said.



Mayor Michael Vargas displays a picture in the Dr. Seuss book "Oh the Thinks You Can Think" to a kindergarten class on March 2.

Study, learn, stay in school

Vargas began his day at Good Hope Elementary School where he read "Oh the Thinks You Can Think" to Carrie Dye's kindergarten class. Vargas is an old hand at reading Dr. Seuss—having begun 25 years ago as a cop and continuing as a Val Verde Unified School District trustee before taking over as mayor. Vargas mixed a bit of sage advice into the reading lesson.

"Don't miss school, learn your shapes, colors and numbers, do your homework," Vargas said. "It's important to stay in school."

Dye said the Mayor's visit made her class feel "special and proud."

"When I told them, they were so happy," she said. "It makes them want to go read—to open a book."

Thirty minutes later, it was on to Enchanted Hills Elementary School where Vargas read to a combination class of third to sixth-graders. The selection this time: "There's a Wocket in My Pocket." After finishing the text, Vargas geared the advice he gave to the kindergartners to a more advance set of children: "Stay in school, practice reading, practice writing, practice math, go to college."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke answers a question from a sixth-grader while participating in Principal for a Day at Sierra Vista Elementary School. Burke also read Dr. Seuss while visiting the campus.

Then it was off to May Ranch where Vargas tackled another Seuss classic, "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish." The book featured a whole lot of rhyming words, prompting one student to blurt out: "That's some serious rhyming," prompting a round of laughter from his peers.

Vargas' day ended at Avalon Elementary School where he dropped in several classes, chatted with the cafeteria staff and repeated the importance of staying in school. Avalon Elementary holds a special place in Vargas' heart—his grandsons go there.

Passion and commitment

Burke spent the day at Sierra Vista Elementary School. It's where her daughter, Jaylyn, attended classes before moving on to high school. Burke's day began with a visit to Melodie Aplin's kindergarten class where she read "The Foot Book."

As part of her presentation, Burke acted out the words "left foot, right foot, front foot, back foot" by moving the appropriate leg. She also gave stickers to the class.



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke reads Dr. Seuss' "The Foot Book" during a visit to Sierra Vista Elementary School March 2.

Aplin said the visit swelled the egos of the lucky kinder kids

"It opens up their world when they have someone to look up to," Aplin said of Burke's visit. "It encourages kids to continue reading. All academics involve reading. It's the groundwork of education."

Burke's duties as Principal for a Day at Sierra Vista included making a Student of the Month presentation, judging a door-decorating contest and conducting informal question-and-answer sessions in several sixth-grade classes. In Phillip Young's class, Burke fielded questions from students curious about the motivations and responsibilities of a Perris City Council member.

Burke said her parents provided the inspiration. They marched with Martin Luther King Jr. at Selma in 1965 and left her with a motto she's lived her whole life: be the change you want to bring about in others. That prompted her to seek election to the Perris City Council in 2014 and re-election in November.

"I love, love, love, love, love what I'm doing," Burke told the class. "Is our job nerve-racking at times? Yes, yes, yes! But seeing Perris become a better City brings me joy and fulfillment. My job on the City Council gives me the joy of serving and helping."



Perris City Hall
101 N. D Street
Perris, CA 92570

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