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## Perris Unveils New Program to Allow 125 Residents to Earn a Bachelor's Degree



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke and Bo Cheli, Program Director for Working Scholars with Study.com, are all smiles after the kick-off of the higher-education initiative Sept. 27 at the Perris City Council Chambers.

### Media Contact

Joe Vargo  
Public Information Officer  
951-943-6100  
[jvargo@cityofperris.org](mailto:jvargo@cityofperris.org)

The City of Perris unveiled an innovative program Sept. 27 that allows 125 residents to earn a Bachelor's Degree at no cost by completing an online curriculum at their own pace, often while at work, at home or even on vacation.

The initial "Perris Scholars Summit" will be followed by a second seminar at 7 p.m. on Nov. 1, at which time residents will get the chance to enroll for courses at Thomas Edison State University, located in Trenton, New Jersey.

The City is partnering with the university, developer Duke Realty and study.com, an online education platform, to make possible the Perris working Scholars program. Duke Realty contributed \$1 million to fund the program.

Several communities in Northern California are participating in the scholarship program but Perris is the first city in Southern California to sign on.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas and City Councilwoman Tonya Burke represented the elected officials during the opening summit, which was attended by more than 50 people.

Also present were City Manager Richard Belmudez, Assistant City Managers Darren Madkin and Clara Miramontes, Administrative Services Director Isabel Carlos, Public Works Director Daryl Hartwill, Director of Community Services and Planning Sabrina Chavez, Planning Manager Kenneth Phung, Counter Services Supervisor Veronica Arana and Human Resources and Risk Manager Saida Amozgar.



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas addresses the audience at the Sept. 27 Perris Scholars Summit: "You can actually go to college on your phone! It's very conducive to working people."

### Great program, dream come true

"A great turnout for a great program," Vargas said at the conclusion of the summit. "We are pleased to be the first City in this part of the state to come aboard. Education is very important to this community and this City Council. What's so great about this program is that you can actually go to college on your phone! It's very conducive to working people."

Burke called the Perris scholars program "a dream come true." She pointed out that a person holding a Bachelor's Degree can expect to earn \$1 million more in lifetime income than someone without it.

"This is something I've always envisioned for our City," Burke said. "It is a good feeling to be able to provide such a good service that people truly want and need."

Bo Cheli, Program Director for Working Scholars with Study.com, said students in the program learn by watching five minute video lessons and then completing a short quiz before moving onto the next lesson. That enables working people to complete one or several lesson during lunch or break periods. The technique also allows students to set their own pace as they advance through coursework. Completing the course work and receiving a Bachelor's degree typically takes two to four years. Academic success coaches are part of the support team to help students earn their degree.

### Lifelong learning

Perris residents attending the information session liked what they heard.

Stay-at-home mom Lynn Pat, 42, said she was open-minded about getting her degree and trying to land future employment in variety of possible occupations.



The City Council Chambers was packed with interested residents interested in obtaining their Bachelor's Degree.

"I'm open-minded about any type of job—and to opportunities I never thought about before," she said. "Learning is a lifelong process. It never ends."

Pat said she appreciated the City's efforts to improve the lives of residents through higher education.

"The City is growing a lot," Pat said. "Thank you to the City of Perris for providing this opportunity to get better jobs. It motivates us to become better citizens."

Heber Deraz, 27, said a Bachelor's Degree might well propel him into a job in the housing industry.

"I think this is a great investment for the City of Perris," he said. "It provides the opportunities for residents to get good jobs and stay in the City."

Allison Ujueta, 42, learned about the seminar on social media and attended, wanting to earn a BA for a possible career in education. A mother of five home-schooled children, Ujueta said she often leads their study sessions and cites math and science as her favorite subjects. She said she was thrilled to attend the kick-off seminar.

"More people with Bachelor's Degrees opens more and more opportunities for Perris residents," she said. "I love Perris. If you can get your degree and stay here you can bring more benefits back to Perris."



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

Hours: Mon. - Fri. 8 am - 6pm

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