



home > city hall > press releases

Crowds Hanker for Health at Annual Fair

Zumba, a live band, a rock wall and obstacle course, health screenings, fresh produce from the City's community garden and the chance to take home a brand new bicycle and safety helmet.

All were part of the City of Perris's 5th annual health fair taking place April 22 on the City Hall Campus. A large and enthusiastic crowd took part in the health fair, which continues the City's "Live Well Perris" healthy eating, active living campaign.

As it has in recent years, Perris partnered with the American Cancer Society and the Perris Elementary School District to make available a trio of events for City residents. The day's activities began with a 5K "Fun Run" that featured about 1,200 participants who conquered a three-mile course through Perris neighborhoods. It was followed by the 24-hour "Relay for Life," which drew hundreds of volunteers who walked around Foss Field Park to celebrate cancer survivors, remember those claimed by the dreaded disease and raise money for research and treatments.



Perris City Councilman Malcolm Corona, City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, Mayor Michael Vargas, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, Mayor Pro Tem David Starr Rabb and City Manager Richard Belmudez took the stage to greet the crowd at the April 22 Health Fair.

"A great day"
At 10 a.m. Perris Mayor Michael Vargas opened the health fair by praising the City's teamwork with the partnering agencies like the school district and Relay for Life.

"It's all about collaboration," he said. "A city can't do all this by itself. It takes cooperation. Events like our health fair are another great example of community engagement. Today is a great day for everybody."

Vargas was joined by his City Council colleagues on stage. Mayor Pro Tem David Starr Rabb said the health fair continues to get bigger and better every year, a sign that residents want to know more about how to get and stay healthy.

"Enjoy yourself," he said. "We keep getting more participants who bring more excitement. Have a great time. Thank you for coming today."

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke said her family has struggled with obesity. She credits Zumba with helping her lose weight and maintain better health. She noted that the City recently adopted a "healthy drink ordinance" to encourage parents to order water, milk or 100 percent juice for their children at fast food restaurants. The City also sponsors a community garden featuring a variety of fruits and vegetables.

"It's a treat to be able to bring to bring all these various activities together in the name of living healthier," Burke said. "We continue to bring events that make residents aware of existing resources so they can live the healthiest lives possible."



Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez, City Councilman Malcolm Corona, City Engineer Habib Motlagh, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke and Mayor Michael Vargas show off their moves during an impromptu Zumba lesson at the City of Perris annual Health Fair on April 22.

City Councilman Malcolm Corona admitted he was tired after running the 5k route pushing a stroller where his son, Malcolm, rode along. But he had enough energy left to join his colleagues, Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez and City Engineer Habib Motlagh on the stage for a group Zumba lesson.

"Give yourself a pat on the back," Corona told the crowd. "Our health fair is a great event because it shows our residents that our City is committed to their health and well-being. We are all about healthy eating and active living."

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers has attended all five health fairs. She has taken part in several activities in the Live Well campaign, including shedding and keeping off weight as part of program's "biggest loser program."

"This matters because healthy living is important," she said.

Rogers said the City is setting the pace for Riverside County and Southern California in its commitment to educating residents in healthy living.

"We are setting the tone," Rogers said. "Other cities are always coming to Perris to see what we are doing."



A student from a Perris Tae Kwon Do studio flies through the air to break a board during a demonstration at the annual City of Perris Health Fair on April 22.

Kids, karate and kale
The health fair included the appearance of Thunder, the mascot from the Lake Elsinore Storm baseball club and a children's section, which proved to be a beehive of activity.

Youngsters challenged an obstacle course, summited a rock-climbing wall, played basketball and tackled a volleyball bouncer. Students from a local Tae Kwon Do school broke wooden boards in half with powerful leg kicks.

The obstacle course was the biggest hit. Designed to get kids active, the course had them running, jumping, and crawling. But most of all it was just fun.

Recreational Leader of the City of Perris Ikeya Adams, 21, enjoyed seeing the kids light up.

"Kids can't get enough of the obstacle course," Adams said. "They're having fun and that's all that matters."

Perris resident Racquel Pettawa, 32, came out with the whole family for what she said was the perfect opportunity to get a little fresh air.

"The City of Perris has a lot of really good events," Pettawa said. "It's a really good chance for the family to get out and have fun."



A Perris dance group shows its stuff while performing a routine at the April 22 City of Perris Health Fair.

The Perris Green City Farm, a community garden at City Hall, hosted a master gardener program, inviting experts to demonstrate their skills and providing residents with helpful tips for sustainable and environmentally friendly growing practices. Residents also got the chance to pick up freshly harvested celery, kale and lettuce. The City would like to see the community garden grow to 30 sites in Perris and is working with non-profit, faith-based, educational and community groups to reach that goal.

Chef Lee Burton, who has conducted many cooking lessons as part of the Live Well Perris program, whipped up a two bean and corn salad during the health fair.

"We just want to provide the community with healthy affordable choices," Burton said, noting that the recipe "is something anyone can use at home that's really simple and economically friendly."



Two youngsters scale a rock wall during the April 22 City of Perris Health Fair.

Health screenings, bike raffle
Volunteers from several medical schools and offices set up in the City gym to conduct health screenings for high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. A blood drive also took place.

Leo Fuentes stopped by to get his blood pressure checked. He welcomed the chance to get the readings.

"It's good for people to know, so they can get an idea about how their health is," Fuentes said. "It's good for the community."

Jaylene Cardella, who took Fuentes blood pressure, praised the City for hosting the event.

"It's a great health fair," she said. "We got the chance to see many people."

Alan Le and Brian Tran are UC Riverside students who hope one day to attend medical school and become doctors. They were part of a group from the school who gave presentations about HIV, high cholesterol and autism.

Both praised the City of Perris for the scope and success of its health fair. It offered more services and drew more people than other health fairs the pair have attended as part of UCR.

Le said health fairs "bridge the communications gap" that often exists between residents and medical professionals. Explaining medical conditions like HIV and cholesterol increases the knowledge among the general public and those who may be or have relatives affected by them.

Tran praised the City's commitment to community education.

"You guys do an amazing job," Tran said. "You guys are big. I'm impressed."

The health fair concluded with the raffling of 76 bicycles and helmets, which went to children, teenagers and adults. Members of the City Council took turns calling out the winning numbers and posing for photos with the winners.

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