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## Perris Staffer Honored—and Hired—by WRCOG

The City of Perris employed a recent college graduate in its on-campus community garden to show that working for local government can be exciting, important and life changing.

Eduardo Sida attacked his new job with gusto, bringing numerous events and programs to the Perris Green City Farm master gardener workshops, nutrition education activities, sales of fruits and vegetables harvested at the garden and work to implement the City's healthy beverage ordinance, one of the first in the state.

Furthermore, Sida established the groundwork to initiate the first Junior Master Gardener's Program in California and became a Master Gardener himself by completing a one-year program through the University of California.

Perris officials were so impressed with Sida's work that after his Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) Public Service Fellowship concluded, they hired him to continue working on the community garden project.

The Perris City Council on May 9 presented Sida with a proclamation for his "outstanding achievements" in making the community-garden program a success and for adding to the legacy of ongoing "Live Well Perris" exercise and healthy eating initiative.

City elected officials and administrators welcomed Sida's replacement, Maria Marquez, who is the second WRCOG Public Service Fellow to join the City's staff.



Eduardo Sida (center) holds a proclamation honoring his work with helping expand the Perris Green City Farm Program, which includes a community garden at the City Hall Campus with plans to add 30 satellite gardens throughout the community.

### "Truly, truly amazing"

Sida graduated from UC Davis with a bachelor's degree in Spanish in 2016 and is working on a master's degree in Public Health at California Baptist University. He is a native of Bloomington.

"I am very grateful to the City of Perris for the opportunity to work here," Sida said. "It is an honor and privilege to work here. The City has an unwavering commitment to improve the health of its residents. What it is doing to improve public health is truly, truly amazing."

The Perris Green City Farm Program marks the latest expansion of the Live Well Perris initiative, which began in 2013.

Other aspects of the Live Well program include weekly workouts, a Wednesday morning walking club, a series of recently completed hikes, an annual health fair, the yearly Senior Prom, numerous "Chef in the Garden" and "Chef in the Classroom" healthy cooking demonstration and the recently approved healthy beverage ordinance.

The Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge, begun last year, calls for Perris to partner with education, faith-based, non-profit and community-based agencies to create 30 "satellite" gardens within the Perris city limits within about 18 months.

Sida's work has already resulted in nine satellite gardens with more expected in the near future. A group of May Ranch Elementary School students visited the on-campus Green City Farm Project recently, where they harvested lettuce and ate vegetarian wraps. Other crops harvested at the garden include kale, lettuce, tomatoes, broccoli, watermelon, strawberries and spices.

A ribbon-cutting is set for later in May at the community garden at Columbia Elementary School, another educational partner.



Eduardo Sida addresses the Perris City Council at its May 9 meeting, thanking them for the community's commitment to healthy-eating choices for Perris residents.

### Kudos from WRCOG

Jennifer Ward, government relations director for WRCOG, said Perris is to be commended for supporting the Public Fellowship Program. Support from the regional planning agency that includes 17 cities in western Riverside County also kick-started the Perris community garden.

In comments at the May 9 City Council meeting, Ward said the Public Fellowship Program is designed to show millennial college graduates that "there are exciting and fun jobs within government."

Too often, Ward said college graduates from universities near Perris, such as UC Riverside, have been unable to find jobs that provide personal satisfaction and financial security, resulting in a "brain drain" that impacted the regional economy and quality of life.

"I'm super excited to be here," Ward said. "Congratulations to the City of Perris for participating in this program."

Marquez, Sida's successor as the WRCOG Public Service Fellow, began her duties about two weeks ago.

"I am excited and enthusiastic and eager to work with the City of Perris," she said.

Marquez holds a bachelor's degree in kinesiology from Cal State, Fullerton, and is working on her master's degree in Public Policy from Cal Baptist.

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