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Kaiser Adds Support to Perris Green City Farm Program

Major sponsorship continues to pour in to support community gardens in Perris.

Kaiser Foundations Hospitals threw its support behind the Perris Green City Farm program July 11 when Cecelia Arias presented a check for \$25,000 to members of the Perris City Council. Arias, community benefit health manager for Kaiser Permanente, praised the City for its commitment to healthier eating by establishing 30 community gardens by partnering with education, faith-based and community organizations.

"Perris is setting an example for other cities to follow," Arias said. "The city leadership is embracing healthy initiative and that speaks highly of its commitment to healthier living. This kind of work is about making changes in the community that run through the course of peoples' lives. It's sustainable, far-reaching and commendable."

Kaiser's contribution marks the latest in a series of major sponsorships supporting the community gardens plan—known officially as the Perris Green City Farm Program. The Western Riverside Council of Governments donated \$42,600 and Eastern Municipal Water District contributed \$25,000 to support the Perris Green City Farm Program, which aims to create a system of gardens from one end of Perris to the other.

The City also received a \$10,000 grant from HealthyCommunity50, a partnership between the Aetna Foundation, the National Association of Counties and the American Public Health Association.

The community gardens would provide fruits, vegetables and herbs and when all 30 sites become available, no Perris resident would have to travel more than half a mile to harvest available crops.



Members of the Perris City Council and City staff accept a \$25,000 donation from Kaiser Foundations Hospitals to support the Perris Green City Farm Program, a series of community gardens to make available healthy food choices to residents. (Left to right) Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, Mayor Michael Vargas, City Councilman Malcolm Corona, Cecelia Arias, Community Benefit Manager for Kaiser Permanente; Assistant Director of Administrative Services Isabel Carlos and Mayor Pro Tem David Starr Rabb.

Multi-faceted commitment

The Green City Farm Program represents just one of the multi-pronged "Live Well Perris" campaign to encourage Perris residents to eat healthier and exercise.

Other elements of Live Well include an annual health fair, weekly workouts, a "Walking Wednesday" program for seniors, City-sponsored hikes, adoption of a healthy drink ordinance, Chef in the Classroom and Chef in the Garden cooking demonstrations and diabetes cooking classes.

Perris has won national, state and regional acclaim for its Live Well program, which has impacted thousands of residents.

Elected officials say the City is committed to promoting Live Well Perris because many residents are at risk of obesity and its effects—high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and diabetes.

Mayor Michael Vargas said the Kaiser grants "speaks volumes" the worth of the community garden project and the City's overall commitment to improving the quality of life for residents. Vargas said he was interviewed by a National League of Cities publication for an article extolling the virtues of the community garden initiative.



Cecelia Arias, Community Benefit Manager for Kaiser Permanente, addresses the July 11 Perris City Council meeting, where she praised the City for its commitment to healthier eating and exercise to improve the lives of residents.

"Very appreciative"

"We are very appreciative of the donation from Kaiser, which will allow us to continue and expand our community garden program," Vargas said.

Perris Mayor Pro Tem David Starr Rabb said the contribution from Kaiser will keep the City in the forefront of communities committed to improving the lives of their residents.

"I'm glad that the City is leading the way in supporting healthy eating with our community garden," Rabb said. "The Kaiser grant is a much-needed addition to our efforts."

Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke said the community garden project will continue to expand the scope and success of Live Well Perris.

"It will allow folks to learn about farming, gardening and agriculture while allowing them to think about alternative food choices," Burke said.

City Councilman Malcolm Corona said the community garden program provides "another great example of how Perris is recognized as a leader and driver to make our Perris a healthy City."

"We are making a push to encourage our residents to live healthier lives and reverse the trend of childhood obesity," he said.

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers said the continuing funding from major sponsors proves the worth of Live Well Perris and the community garden initiative.

"It's always wonderful when other entities acknowledge the great work of the City of Perris," Rogers said. "We are grateful to have the support of WRCOG, EMWD and Kaiser as we continue to expand this program and bring its benefits to our residents."

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