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City Workers and Officials Get Garden Growing



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch next to the Washington cherry tomato he planted March 31 at the Green City Farm Program, the official name of the Perris community garden. The garden will be unveiled to the public April 23 during the annual health fair.

Perris City workers and elected representatives put on work gloves and planted seedlings March 31 in a new community garden already being hailed as a model of sustainability, water-conservation, community engagement and healthy living.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch led a contingent of elected officials who planted peppers, lettuce, tomatoes, basil, onions and other crops at the "Green City Farm Program," as the garden on the City Hall Campus officially known.

Other City elected officials taking part in the first-day planting included Mayor Pro-Tem Rogers and City Councilmembers Tonya Burke and Mark Yarbrough.

Busch, who planted cherry tomatoes in a vertical growing tower, said he is eager for the community-garden concept to take root in Perris.

He noted that the garden continues the hugely successful Live Well Perris healthy eating active living campaign, which includes an annual health fair, free exercise workouts and nutrition-education classes. The community garden grew out of a City Council vision that staff made reality.

An official open-house inviting the public to view the garden takes place from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on April 23 during the City's annual health fair.

"We have been talking about this for a long time," Busch said. "It represents a new look and a fresh look for our Live Well program. It's a great experience for our community, especially for our children who can learn about gardening, growing healthy food and making healthy food choices. I look forward to seeing it progress."

City officials said more than 40 people took part in the initial planting, a turnout that pleased the mayor.

"The success of any program depends upon its support from the community," he said. "If today's turnout is indicative, the garden will be very successful."



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers is all smiles as she plants spinach in a vertical growing tower March 31 at the City's new community garden.

Other City Council members voiced similar sentiments.

Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers, who planted spinach seedlings, said she is pleased because the City is partnering with schools, businesses, other government agencies and the public to ensure the garden prospers.

"I'm very excited to take part in this kickoff of our wonderful community garden," Rogers said. "It's inspiring to see so many community members coming together to support this garden. It's wonderful so many are supporting it."

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke said she expects the garden to inspire other communities to adopt similar initiatives. In addition to growing and harvesting produce, the Perris project includes areas for an outdoor classroom to teach residents good eating tips and demonstrate how to prepare healthy choices. The City invited Perris school children to create drawings to illustrate their vision of the project. The best were turned into decorative tiles that enhance the look of the garden.

"I think it's going to be a model for the Inland Empire and beyond," said Burke, who planted sweet pepper seedlings. "We're going to roll out the green carpet! I think it's going to be a real centerpiece for educating our community about the importance of a health, balanced diet. We've got a great team that is innovative and always thinks outside the box. We're setting the pace. I expect other cities will follow."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke plants a sweet pepper in a vertical tower at the new community garden on the City Hall Campus.

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough said the community garden keeps Perris on the cutting edge of eco-friendly, sustainable and much-needed programs that also score major points with Perris residents, including those that live in confined spaces like small apartments.

"We're teaching people how they can grow healthy food in small areas to improve their daily lives," he said. "There's a lot to be showcased here. It's educational, it's urban gardening and it's fun. It's a win-win-win situation."

City Councilman David Starr Rabb could not attend Thursday's opening day activities but predicted the garden will be a great asset to Perris. Residents will learn the importance of swapping sugary, high-calorie snacks for healthy fruits and vegetables, Rabb said.

"It's great to be providing fresh produce for our City," he said. "I look forward to the community taking part in this wonderful project."



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough planted kale and cherry tomatoes at the new community garden.

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