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Community Garden Shows Green Growth Spurt



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch points out the planter where he placed a cherry tomato now ready for harvesting during the April 23 unveiling of the Green City Farm Project.

The City of Perris unveiled its community garden April 23 and the initial reviews indicate it's going to be a huge success with green-thumb residents and another asset for the City.

The garden, located on the City Hall Campus, continues the Live Well Perris healthy-eating active-living campaign. But it's more than just another garden-variety garden.

The new garden, officially called the "Green City Farm Project," features a variety of the 21st Century growing techniques, including vertical hydroponic towers that employ water to irrigate roots, aeroponic towers that mist plant roots to facilitate growth, aquaponic towers that make use of nutrients from fish to fertilize the plants.

The garden also includes traditional raised garden beds.

Cost of the garden was about \$75,000, most of which came in the form of grants. The City partnered with Eastern Municipal Water District, the Riverside County Department of Public Health, local nurseries and gardening-supply companies, residents and non-profits to bring the garden to reality.

Perris elected officials toured the garden during the City's fourth Annual Health Fair. They viewed the crops they had previously planted, toured the completed initial phase and chatted with residents interested in staking a claim to a tower or planter box of their own.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch spotted the cherry tomato he planted prior to the official opening. He said he received inquiries from residents wanting information about how they can obtain space in the garden. The City is accepting applications from interested residents, and additional information will be posted in the near future on the municipal website.

"This is beautiful garden," Bush said. "It's a big hit and I expect the community is going to support it whole-heartedly."



Perris Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers said the community garden "looks wonderful" and will be "an unqualified success."

Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers agreed with the mayor, saying the garden "looks wonderful" and called it "an unqualified success." Rogers planted spinach seedlings.

"It's wonderful to come back and see how these seedlings have grown," Rogers said. "Things are looking great."

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke said the Green City Farm Project exceeded her expectations. And those were significant.

"I am blown away," she said. "This is well beyond anything I could imagine. The food in this community will help local residents. That's a really good feeling. This City is so innovative and thinks outside the box. That's what keeps this community thriving."

City Councilman David Starr Rabb was impressed with the innovative growing techniques used as the City farm. Looking at a vertical growing tower stuffed with seedlings that included peppers, lettuce, cilantro and tomatoes, Rabb noted that "it removes the need for weeding!"

"I want one," he said. "We are one of the few cities with such innovative and forward-thinking growing techniques."



Perris City Councilman David Starr Rabb makes ready to plant a seedling April 23 during the official unveiling of the Perris community garden, known officially as the "Green City Farm Project."

Perris resident Lisa Russell led visitors through the garden. She said she was so impressed with the City's commitment to improving the lives of its residents through healthy eating that she moved here from a nearby community. Russell was particularly pleased that the garden uses 90 percent less water than traditional growing methods.

"Water can be so expensive people can't afford to garden," said Russell, who describes herself as a garden coordinator/liaison.

She said participates in Live Well Perris programs because the goal is to see "how we can help people become successful."

"I wanted to be part of a community that outreaches to its residents," she said.

Teacher Gabriella Vargas said she would incorporate the lessons learned from the community garden into her curriculum.

"The garden is a great opportunity to gain access to healthy eating options," Vargas said. "It's a great opportunity to get people more involved in their community."



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke spots her signature near the seedling she planted a few weeks before and is now ready for harvesting.

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