



home > city hall > press releases

Health-seeking Residents Draw to Chef in the Garden



Chef Lee Burton describes how to make "rainbow coleslaw" during the first "Chef in the Classroom" event sponsored by the City of Perris, which was attended by 75 people.

The City of Perris's first-ever "Chef in the Garden" program drew 75 adults and children interested in learning how to prepare healthy meals and ward off debilitating medical conditions like diabetes and high-blood pressure.

Chef Lee Burton conducted the one-hour session Sept. 28 at the Perris community garden, known officially as the "Perris Green City Farm Program" on the City Hall Campus.

Burton's lesson provided practical tips for consumers (exercise portion control by measuring snacks before they go on the plate), encouragement for aspiring young chefs ("it's never too late to get kids in the kitchen") and the benefit of a well-balanced diet ("better eating equals better grades!")

Burton has conducted dozens of "Chef in the Classroom" sessions at elementary schools in Perris during the last two years. The recent lesson in the community garden expands the school curriculum. Burton considers Perris a pace setter in Inland Southern California in promoting healthy food habits to its residents.

"This City is leading the way," Burton said. "Perris is addressing the health needs of the community. We are on to some really good things in the City of Perris and I am proud to be part of them."



Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez (Right) and Assistant Director of Administrative Services Isabel Carlos with Chef Lee Burton at the community garden.

The evening also included Burton inviting several children and adults to prep "rainbow coleslaw," which included produce grown in the community garden—cabbage, carrots, red onion and sweet red and yellow bell peppers.

Several parents said they are coping with diabetes or are pre-diabetic and attended to learn how to prepare foods that would keep or return them to the path of healthier living.

Arcena Upson wanted to pick up some better-eating tips to help her cope with diabetes. She's also interested in passing on healthy-eating habits to daughters, Aalyiah, 14, and Angel, 13. She said she appreciated the City creating a garden as a living classroom.

"Eating healthy is about my health," Upson said. "This is a great opportunity for Perris residents, especially children, to create their own garden. It's wonderful. It's about helping people help themselves."



Jonathan Garcia, 8, serves a portion of rainbow coleslaw during the Chef in the Garden class at the City of Perris.

Eating healthy matters to Sofia Rubio.

She's pre-diabetic and doesn't want the condition to worsen so soda and chips are out of the family diet and organic foods are in. Like many others, she came to the initial Chef in the Garden class with her children—Angel, 7, Alexandria, 5, and Andrew, 4.

"I am really grateful for this opportunity," Rubio said. "It gives us the opportunity to learn about growing, cooking and eating healthier foods."

Jonathan Garcia, 8, helped serve portions of the rainbow coleslaw to the audience. The third-grader at Ridgemoor Elementary School attended the event with his mother, Maria Santos, and little brother, Mateo, 2. Mom said she is eager to pick up a few healthy-eating and cooking tips.

"It's good to get the kids involved in the cooking process," Santos said.

The next session of the Chef-in-the-Garden program takes place Oct. 26 at 6 p.m. in the community garden, 101 North D Street.



The City of Perris Green City Farm Program uses innovative growing techniques to produce a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

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