

Community fair in northern Willow Glen promotes health and safety

Residents learn more about programs and services in local area

By [Moryt Milo](#)

Health, safety and public awareness were the main topics addressed at a community fair in north Willow Glen on the Gardner Academy campus Sept.29.

The fair, organized through the office of District 23 State Assemblyman Manny Diaz, was designed to promote greater public awareness about local, county and state programs and services. Diaz represents areas of downtown and East San Jose, including much of Willow Glen.

Visitors received an assortment of free food, drinks and useful handouts, including bandages and safety lights. They could also stop at strategically placed tables with literature and enrollment applications for Santa Clara County's new healthcare program, Healthy Kids, that provides medical and dental coverage to all uninsured children in the county.

In addition, a table staffed by the Gardner Family Health Center offered free diabetes testing. Many families also took the opportunity to have their children fingerprinted.

Lines formed as children and adults alike learned how to turn off the gas coming to their homes at an earthquake preparedness

table, while a nearby table provided information on preventing pollution around their homes.

Police, firefighters and paramedics were at the fair to speak with families and let children sit and look inside their emergency vehicles. As children waited to climb inside the fire truck, local officers and neighbors got the chance to become better acquainted.

"It's good to see the ambulance and the fire department," said Maria Yolanda, who was attending the fair with her 9-year-old son. "If they do this often we can get closer to them and know who works for us."

The fair offered a variety of services and information from free gun locks to free dental exams and cleanings in the Tooth Mobile, a complete mobile dental care facility.

Dentist Alireza Parhizkari said that when the tooth mobile visits schools, "kids don't show the fears that you would typically see when children come to an office. The goal of the [program] is not only to take care of any immediate cavities and infections but to also create a positive experience for the rest of their lives."

The traveling dental unit offers cleanings, X-rays, cavity-fillings and even root-canal work.

Diaz reiterated the importance of proper dental care when he addressed the crowd and said, "I have a confession to make. I went over to the Tooth Mobile, and since I hadn't been to the dentist in a while, I found out I had two cavities."

Diaz also encouraged parents to check out Healthy Kids, which provides health care coverage to children even if their parents are not legal U.S. residents.

He said this was the first time his office had organized a fair in the Gardner community and "felt it was important to be here and have programs that focused on health, public safety and awareness."

The fair also had an electric train display set up by Caltrain's Operation Safety running in the school's gym to promote railroad

safety. The Gardner neighborhood is located along several active train lines, and Amtrak Police Captain James J. Martino said he and his officers were at the fair to hand out brochures, educate children about the "dos and don'ts of rail safety" and remind neighbors about recent law changes.

"It's now against the law to walk on the railroad tracks," Martino said. "It's considered trespassing."

Public transportation information was prevalent throughout the fair with Caltrain and the Valley Transit Authority providing maps and schedules of bus, train and light rail routes.

"We also offer teachers two passes a year for class field trips," said an employee manning the VTA table. "They just need to sign up."

Many of those at the fair to represent agencies and organizations wanted neighbors to know they have outreach programs in local schools or open their facilities for tours. Ed Smith, an employee with Santa Clara Communications, said his agency offers school tours of its 911 Communication Center and sends a mobile unit to schools.

To further connect with the neighborhood, members of the San Jose State University women's basketball team were at the fair handing out literature and introducing themselves to the crowd.

"We are here helping out the community," said Teoma Taylor, a sophomore who plays forward for team.

For three hours the school grounds were filled with music--Radio 1290 KAZA and a mariachi band entertained fair-goers.

Sam Joaquin, whose daughter is in kindergarten at Gardner Academy, thought the information being distributed was helpful and said, "It is really nice that they are doing this for the community."