

Ranch Afterschool Program recognized for excellence

Costa Mesa's Parks and Community Services Department has been chosen for the 2015 California Park & Recreation Society Award of Excellence for Environmental Stewardship for its Ranch Afterschool Program.

The Ranch Afterschool Program's collaboration with the OC Fair & Event Center, the City of Costa Mesa, and the Newport-Mesa Unified School District, aids in providing a unique after school experience in which students focus on agricultural concepts like gardening, livestock, and leather working.

"The Parks and Community Services Department is honored to receive the California Parks and Recreation Society's (CPRS) Award of Excellence in Environmental Stewardship, for the Ranch After-School Program," said Ashley Ocasio, the city's assistant recreation supervisor. "Children enrolled in this unique program learn first-hand what it means to be a farmer through lessons learned by cultivating farm land, gardening, raising and caring for livestock and creating leather crafts."

The students have a hands-on experience caring for animals on the Farm which includes: chickens, sheep, pigs, goats, llamas, cattle, and horses. They learn responsible animal care by cleaning stalls, grooming, and exercising the animals.

Additionally, the Farm dedicates land for each student to create and maintain an individual garden. Students' gardening responsibilities include planting, watering, fertilizing, weeding, inspecting for pests and harvesting their plot.

Agricultural education helps children learn about healthy food choices and teaches them different ways to access fresh fruits and vegetables. Most importantly, students begin to understand the deep impact agriculture has in their lives

past, future and present.

“This free program is a true collaboration and would not be possible without the support of the Orange County Fairgrounds,” Ocasio said. “This strategic partnership provides many Costa Mesa youth the opportunity to experience an unique after-school program, in which the focus in on agriculture and farming”

The California Park & Recreation Society awards program recognizes outstanding achievement in the areas of facility design, park planning, marketing and communication, and community improvement and programming through demonstrating the principals of resourcefulness, execution, accomplishment and alignment with the parks and recreation mission.

The presentation of awards will take place at the annual Awards Recognition Banquet scheduled for Friday, March 11, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency Long Beach, beginning at 5:30 p.m.