



## Community-Wide Collaborations Benefit Our Kids!

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When Santa Clarita officially became a city on December 15, 1987, it was the largest area every to incorporate in the history of California. For Santa Clarita, doing things differently from the onset actually set the stage for this young City. Since incorporation, Santa Clarita has thrived on some of its unconventional, non-bureaucratic innovations that have resulted in an award-winning city.

Like other California cities, Santa Clarita has its share of problems and issues. The difference is in how this 20-year old City chooses to deal with them that have brought home national accolades like America's Promise, which named Santa Clarita as one of its top 100 best communities for youth in the U.S. in 2007.

Collaboration. You can't succeed without it. By becoming involved and integrated with a myriad of organizations, non-profits, government agencies and neighborhood groups, residents and businesses, the City of Santa Clarita has been successful in "Investing in Our Youth." The premise is simple. By expending more time, money and energy on "the front end," with quality youth programs, after school programs, and building more parks and recreational facilities, Santa Clarita is actually preventing some of the need to spend more money on the back end, such as with prisons, probation, youth camps, law enforcement and "fixing" youth crimes such as graffiti and vandalism.

What this looks like are policies and practices for the City to spend more money, time and talent on parks, recreation and community services than on law enforcement; a unique concept for a city. Some outgrowths of this policy and practice include "joint use agreements" with the school districts, the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA to create more recreational opportunities for youth. It includes a "top down" method of management and leadership that has led to Santa Clarita city staff being creative and proactive to get things done, and having a bias for action to make it happen.

In just 20 years, Santa Clarita has constructed or improved 17 City parks, including the crown jewel, the 80-acre Central Park. The City has constructed the 20-acre Santa Clarita Sports Complex on the east side of town, inclusive of an activities center, a gymnasium, the Aquatics Center and a skatepark. Plans are underway this year to expand the Sports Complex to include outdoor basketball courts, a larger skatepark, a hockey rink and a dog park. Last year, the City opened a new, state-of-the-art Community Center in the heart of Old Town Newhall, which boasts membership of over 3,000. The City has constructed 34 miles of off-street trails for enjoyment of the great outdoors, and partnered to bring over 3,000 acres of open space land into public ownership. Since cityhood, Santa Clarita has consistently ranked in the top five safest cities in the country for a city of its size. This healthy lifestyle approach extends to the City's many programs, like "Healthy Santa Clarita," which provide residents with hundreds of organized sports activities for youth and adults, dance, exercise, boxing, martial arts and other fun things to do, all aimed at improving the fitness level of local families.

Santa Clarita's citizen Anti Gang Task Force, founded in 1991 by the City and the Sheriff's Department, helps youth stay out of or disassociate with gangs through in-school intervention programs. These programs build self esteem, give direction and develop life skills in youth; in addition to raising awareness on preventative measures and gang related issues. It is comprised of community members, school personnel, law enforcement and volunteers.

The multi-collaborative Blue Ribbon Task Force was formed in 2000 by the Santa Clarita City Council in response to parental concerns for unhealthy teen behaviors identified in the community. The Task Force helps to educate the community and teens about teen alcohol, drug and tobacco use. It includes community based organizations, parents, youth, educators, law enforcement, businesses and City staff. Issues are proactively addressed and featured in an

annual community forum attended by hundreds of teens and parents. The Blue Ribbon Task Force developed the “kNOw MORE” campaign to raise community awareness of the high level of teenage speeding and alcohol related traffic collisions, advocating for and designing a community memorial dedicated to youth who died in traffic accidents. The award-winning Youth Grove Memorial at the City’s Central park stands today as a teaching tool for youth. The Visions in Progress (VIP) was created in 2002 and is an assembly of teens from different high schools working together as a unified community voice. Visions in Progress provides an avenue for input and action from teens on teen related activities, issues and decisions. The group encourages youth to be advocates on issues that affect their schools and community. Some issues they’ve tackled include curfew and healthy lifestyles.

Since 1989, the City sponsored Youth in Government program has provided training and internship curriculum to area teens. It educates youth on how their City government operates and provides them with an opportunity to participate and learn how to be active in their community and in their government. Teens participate in a mock city council meeting and six week internships in the subject area of their choice.

The City of Santa Clarita’s Human Relations Forum is one of the best in Los Angeles County. Comprised of residents, business and school leaders, parents, students and city staff, the mission of the Santa Clarita Valley Human Relations Forum is to encourage, assist, and empower our community to eliminate all forms of discrimination, and to promote understanding and appreciation of human differences. Started in 1994, the Human Relations Forum has worked to promote positive human relations and acceptance of all people in every aspect of community life with programs like: Operation Us, developed and presented by high school students which addresses race relations and prejudice in the community. The high school students facilitate interactive assemblies

held for sixth grade students. The goal is to break racial and cultural barriers that exist and develop understanding among the diverse student population in Santa Clarita. The program has reached over 8,000 students since its inception in 2003; Person of Kindness and Character Counts in Santa Clarita, which recognizes youth, adults, families, and businesses in the community who have demonstrated acts of kindness and good character. Nominees receive a letter of recognition and a window decal or bumper sticker stating, “I practice Random Acts of Kindness in Santa Clarita.” The overall goal of the Human Relations Forum is to make Santa Clarita a place where all people can live and work peacefully with a better understanding of each other and the value of diversity.

The City’s new Community Court program is aimed at providing a choice to Santa Clarita youth offenders to participate in a program that rehabilitates them and helps them to make a real change in the direction of their future. The Santa Clarita Community Court provides first-time, non-violent, juvenile offenders with an alternative to the County juvenile justice system and the possibility of a clean slate. The community-based diversion program works to help youth realize every choice has a consequence and ensures community service time is completed within the City. By working to reach out to local troubled youth after their first offense and persuade them not to commit a crime again, the City is enabling offenders with positive tools to make good life choices, and thus the City hopes to influence each participant’s life in a positive way. The goal of the Community Court is a central part of the Investing in our Youth philosophy to prevent future crime by addressing human issues and public safety problems locally when they occur, or before they become major.

Santa Clarita is a model for Investing in Youth and providing the necessary infrastructure, programs and leadership to assure that the next generation grows up strong and ready to accept the challenges of their world.