

# Bell Gardens FALL 2015 *Today*



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Everything you need for FALL - Complete recreation program information inside.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR  
CITY MANAGER



*In this issue of  
Bell Gardens Today* you'll find

stories about school safety, student leadership, inspirational community involvement, crime prevention, business growth and programs that help everyone get healthier - all parts of improving the quality of life every day for the residents of our City.

Every one of these subjects has been touched by the people of City Hall, especially during the budget process. This teamwork has resulted in a financially stable and well-balanced community. Perhaps the best way to give you an idea of how this works is to share some of my presentation to the City Council on June 8, followed by the City Council voting to adopt the new fiscal year budget:

"Like most cities throughout the country, the sluggish economy created by the "Great Recession" has negatively impacted Bell Gardens. Even though it has been a tremendous challenge, we have made every effort to meet the demand for services, even while facing dwindling tax revenues.

We are slowly emerging from the recession, but we need to be cautiously optimistic because it will take some time before we see the same level of tax revenues that were generated in the past. While optimism is warranted, I remind you that it was only several years ago that the City was operating with a financial deficit. We have not yet totally recovered from a period of flat sales and property taxes, declining casino revenue, and other essential sources of income that deteriorated and adversely impacted the City's finances.



The City's revenue stream is largely influenced by overall economic conditions. Despite the positive steps we have made in recovery, we still face some very critical fiscal challenges; however, in partnership with the City Council, I assure you that the staff will continue to deliver high-quality programs and services to our community.

I am pleased to present to you a proposed \$27,975,000 unrestricted General Fund budget for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2015 which includes a projected budget surplus of \$211,000. This was accomplished even after directing \$200,000 into the Reserve Fund, now totaling \$2,300,000. The entire City budget, which includes the General Fund, all special revenues, capital projects, enterprise funds and the Successor Agency totals \$47,157,000. This budget is the result of a strong commitment to responsible financial management."

As you can see, working together through both the tough times and the good times have resulted in the great community we all enjoy. If you have any questions or comments about the budget process or any of the issues addressed in this Fall edition of Bell Gardens Today, please feel free to get in touch with City Hall at [www.bellgardens.org](http://www.bellgardens.org).

*Philip Wagner*

CITY MANAGER



## CITY OFFICIALS

### Bell Gardens City Council

Jennifer Rodriguez, Mayor  
Pedro Aceituno, Mayor Pro Tem  
Priscilla Flores, Councilmember  
Jose J. Mendoza, Councilmember  
Maria Pulido, Councilmember

Philip Wagner, City Manager  
John Oropeza, Assistant City Manager

*The public is welcome at all city meetings, which are held in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 7100 Garfield Avenue, Bell Gardens:*

### CITY COUNCIL

2nd and 4th Monday of the month at 6 p.m.  
Notice of Special City Council Meetings will be posted at City Hall and City facilities.

### EDUCATION COMMISSION

2nd Thursday of the month at 5 p.m.

### PLANNING COMMISSION

3rd Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m.

### RECREATION, CULTURAL AND YOUTH COMMISSION

3rd Thursday of the month at 6 p.m.

### SENIOR CITIZEN COMMISSION

2nd Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

### TRAFFIC AND SAFETY COMMISSION

1st Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m.

## ANOTHER RECORD-BREAKING EVENT

On June 6, a curbside community cleanup that allowed Bell Gardens residents to dispose of unlimited amounts of bulky items such as furniture, household items and appliances at no cost, broke all previous records for the tonnage collected.

According to Athens Services, which conducted the collection, 124 tons were gathered from curbside, breaking the record for the amount collected in one day. Previous collection efforts resulted in 56 tons taken away in 2011, 32 tons in 2012, 60 tons in 2013 and 92 tons in 2014.

The event is promoted by the City of Bell Gardens Public Works Department in an effort to help residents keep their yards and areas around their homes free of discarded items.

"This event also keeps the city clean and beautiful by reducing illegal dumping," said Bell Gardens Public Works Director Chau Vu.

**On the Cover:**  
**School Safety**

# Bell Gardens Today



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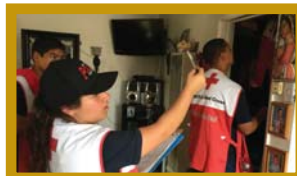
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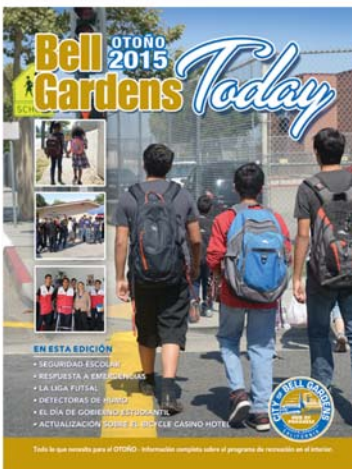
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**Bell Gardens Today** is published quarterly by the City of Bell Gardens to provide information to the community about the City's programs, services and activities.

Visit us at [www.bellgardens.org](http://www.bellgardens.org) for updated city information.

Go to [www.bgrecreation.org](http://www.bgrecreation.org) for recreation programs and events. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

# School safety is everyone's responsibility



## A TEAM EFFORT FOR STUDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

In 2012, Bell Gardens received the first of three grants from federal sources and the State of California's Safe Routes for Schools program. These grants allowed the City of Bell Gardens to establish **Bell Gardens Safe and Healthy Kids**, a program partnership between the City and the Montebello Unified School District dedicated to improving the health and safety of all students.

The grants provided several ways to help students learn about safety and develop a healthy lifestyle. Four goals were selected: Education, Encouragement, Enforcement and Evaluation, which focused on making sure that each child learned about safety and developing a healthy lifestyle.

- ✿ *An interactive website, [www.bgsafekids.com](http://www.bgsafekids.com), was developed as an outreach for all schools, students and their families. It is full of tips and links to information about pedestrian and bicycle safety, healthy eating, the dangers of youth obesity, the need for physical activity and the benefits of these activities for the entire community.*

- ✿ *Grant funding provided bicycles that were raffled off to one female and one male student at each grade level at every elementary and intermediate school.*
- ✿ *A 12-page bilingual magazine was developed as a companion to the website, full of information about safety and healthy lifestyles and links to learn more about specific subjects. This magazine is now available online at [www.bgsafekids.com](http://www.bgsafekids.com).*
- ✿ *Signage, in the form of banners, was provided by the City to each school site, reminding commuters to slow down in the school zone.*

The "Be Strong, Live Long" essay contest in the spring of 2014 involved nearly a thousand students at elementary and intermediate grades in writing about healthy lifestyles. Participating classes received activity kits that included handballs, a basketball, soccer ball, football and jump ropes, ensuring healthy activities throughout the school year.

[www.bgsafekids.com](http://www.bgsafekids.com)



## TAKING SAFETY TO THE STREETS

Creating a safe environment outside the classroom is a team effort of the school district, Bell Gardens Police Department and the City itself.

Crossing guards have been placed at locations determined after careful study of pedestrian traffic and vehicle counts.

As part of the ongoing efforts to provide a safe environment around each campus, the city recently submitted a \$1.2 million grant request to METRO for safety improvements at two intersections close to Bell Gardens Intermediate and Garfield Elementary Schools. The City is also pursuing an Active Transportation Plan grant to promote bike and pedestrian trails for all Bell Gardens residents.



These newer projects build on the strong foundation of previous multi-agency efforts, spearheaded by the City.

- ☀ *In 2008, the City received a \$319,530 grant from the California Safe Routes to School program with the goal of slowing traffic and increasing pedestrian safety. Improvements included solar power-illuminated warning signs in school areas, in-pavement crosswalk lights, repainted crosswalks, and solar-powered radar speed feedback.*
- ☀ *A 2011 federal Safe Routes to School \$337,280 grant allowed for expanded safety measures at additional locations and in 2012, another state grant in the amount of \$361,680 allowed the City to complete installation at all schools.*
- ☀ *In addition, the City financed the construction of a fence along the center corridor of Garfield Avenue to keep*



*parents and children from crossing the major thoroughfare in front of Garfield Elementary School.*

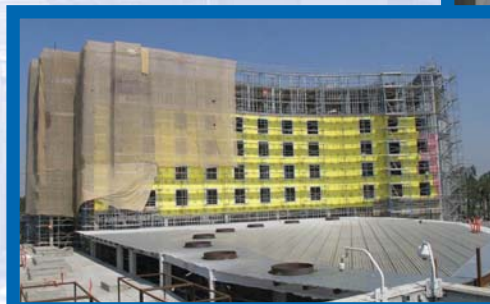
These efforts fostered communication and cooperation between the school district and City to address safety concerns. Traffic and parking regulation enforcement efforts in school zones are ongoing and one of the best ways to ensure student and parent safety.

## CONSTRUCTION UPDATES

### WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE CASINO?

Construction of the hotel at the Bicycle Casino continues with anticipated completion in September and a planned Grand Opening in October. You can see from the photos some of the interior designs and highlights of the luxury suites. There's even a "Construction Cam" that you can check out 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at

<http://oxblue.com/open/rdolson/bicyclecasino>



## BELL GARDENS - PUTTING EMERGENCY RESPONDERS FIRST



The streets of Bell Gardens will be a little bit safer soon when a new system that synchronizes traffic signals to streamline the flow of traffic for emergency vehicles is put into operation.

An Opticom traffic control override system that will allow police, fire and paramedic vehicles responding to emergency calls to turn red lights to green at key intersection has been installed. An infrared transmitter on each emergency vehicle sends a signal to a receiver mounted on or near traffic lights, which allows the light to change from red to green or remain green to keep traffic moving in the direction the responders need to go.

While the basic traffic rule of pulling over and stopping when emergency vehicles approach still holds true, this new system will help get them where they are most needed in the shortest amount of time.

Changing lights to green eliminates disruption for drivers, including those who may become confused when they see flashing red lights behind or in front of them. The Opticom system also includes floodlights that beam steady when the emergency vehicle is approaching from behind and flash when the first responders are approaching from the opposite direction. The system does not record traffic going through the intersections.

The systems will be installed at six intersections in Bell Gardens:

- ☀ *Eastern Avenue and Watcher Street*
- ☀ *Eastern Avenue and Florence Avenue*
- ☀ *Ajax Avenue and Florence Avenue*
- ☀ *El Selinda Avenue and Florence Avenue*
- ☀ *Garfield Avenue and Florence Avenue*
- ☀ *Darwell Avenue and Gage Avenue*

Funding came from three major sources; \$164,622 from the federal Highway Safety Improvement Program, \$53,000 from Proposition C transportation funds and a grant of \$30,000 from the Bicycle Casino.

## NEIGHBORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### COVERING THEIR GROUND IN FIGHTING THE DROUGHT

Bell Gardens residents turned out in force May 30 to receive compost for their gardens from Athens Services. Twenty tons of the organic material that helps hold moisture in the soil and protects vegetation was distributed to eager crowds who lined up at 7 a.m. with their containers.

“People really appreciated the compost because they understood what it could do,” said James Brietling, Government Affairs Manager for Athens Services. Due to the popularity of the event, a second compost giveaway may be held in September. Watch [www.bellgardens.org](http://www.bellgardens.org) for updates.



## NOTHING FALSE ABOUT THIS ALARMING NEWS

In an effort to make best use of law enforcement resources, the Bell Gardens Police Department is cracking down on false alarms at business and residence locations. Part of the increased enforcement is utilizing a private firm to collect fines from alarm abusers.

“The main problem was the lack of a formal procedure and no recordkeeping,” said Bell Gardens Police Lt Brendan Kirkpatrick. “We needed a better clearinghouse.”

In other cities, an alarm management company, coupled with a strong ordinance has resulted in up to 70% reduction in false alarms. When police officers have to respond to a false alarm, it takes them away from other calls that might be more urgent.

The city has put in place a restructured fee system with costs appropriate to each alarm type. For example, a dependent adult or senior who has a residential alarm will pay less for a false alarm than a business.

“Often with panic alarms, we rush over thinking there was a robbery and when we got there, it would be something benign that caused the alarm button to be accidentally pushed,” Kirkpatrick said.

“Businesses need to educate their employees. It's a learning curve.”

Information on alarm fees is available on the city's website at [www.bellgardens.org](http://www.bellgardens.org).

## FUTSAL KICKS UP FITNESS AND SPIRIT

### Fall season registration coming up



players. Regular league play features youth players on the field Mondays through Thursdays, with Fridays reserved for the grownups.

The futsal court at Veterans Park, formerly an underused handball court, was converted in 2014 with a grant from the Bicycle Casino Community Foundation. Recreation Director Chris Dasté said that expanding the futsal league is another way of fulfilling the Casino's goal of helping combat childhood obesity and contributing to the community.

Futsal was developed in Brazil and is similar to soccer, but on a much smaller scale. Instead of 11 players on each team, there are five players on each team in futsal and the game is played on a much smaller

court. With the success of youth leagues over the spring and summer seasons, Bell Gardens recreation officials have expanded the league to include adult

players. Players have more opportunity to develop their skills; they have more contact with the ball and do more passing, the “field” is concrete and the ball heavier.

The fall leagues will be set up on an alternate night schedule - with leagues on the courts on Mondays and Wednesdays and different leagues on Tuesdays and Thursdays to accommodate other sports that the young athletes may be playing.



The fall youth league will involve six weeks of developing skills and six weeks of games; adult players will play 12 to 14 games, depending on how many players sign up. Youth league fall registration dates are October 12 through November 20; call the Recreation Department at (562) 806-7650 or visit [www.bgrecreation.org](http://www.bgrecreation.org) for information on adult registration.



## DETECTING A RECORD-BREAKING EFFORT



Leave it to Bell Gardens to break the record for installing more than 270 smoke alarms during one day in tandem with the Red Cross-Los Angeles Region grant program to provide greater public safety.

With alarms provided by a FEMA grant to the Red Cross, Bell Gardens Police Explorers pre-canvassed a targeted portion of the city where there had been several fires. It was discovered that only 1 or 2 out of every 10 homes in that area had working smoke alarms. The Explorers set up appointments for these homeowners to receive the detectors and installation on June 27.

Led by the Bell Gardens Police Explorers, and with help from Los Angeles County Fire Explorers and neighboring Bell Police Department Explorers and other community volunteers, 19 teams worked through the day installing the donated smoke alarms for very happy homeowners. A second installation day was held July 18 for those homeowners who were not available on the 27th.

"Some of these were older homes and individuals who would not have been able to afford smoke detectors, so the need was there," said Guillermo Sanchez, Manager of Preparedness and Resiliency for the American Red Cross, Los Angeles Region.

"Everything went without a hitch," said Nancy Hernandez, Explorer Advisor for Bell Gardens Police Department. "It was the first time Bell Gardens received this grant and both the kids and the citizens had fun during the event."

Sanchez said that there would be more smoke detector installations in the future; anyone wishing to participate should call (310) 477-2493.





# STUDENT GOVERNMENT DAY A HIT WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS

Recently, 150 seniors from Bell Gardens High School filled the City Council chambers at Bell Gardens City Hall to participate in the annual Student Government Day and hear from JPL Engineer Tom Nolan, whose message was "Tell me I can't do it - I dare you!" - one that was very well received by the eager students.

For more than 40 years, Bell Gardens has taken a day every year to mentor the students, who are assigned a staff member to "shadow." The students explore the government complex learning about their mentors' jobs, ask questions about preparing for their futures and gain valuable insights into how the City runs.



*Student City Council Members, (L-R): Mario Dolores, Jorgel Chavez, Nestor Carrera (Student Mayor), Cadmiel Delgado, and Julian Hill (Student Mayor Pro-Tem).*

At noon, the students gathered in the ballroom at the Bicycle Casino for lunch and heard teacher, playwright

and poet Marco A. Vasquez share his inspirational story with the students before they returned to school.



## LICENSE PLATE CAMERAS PUT BRAKES ON CRIME

An Update is coming for the Automated License Plate Reader system in use by Bell Gardens Police Department for the last five years, thanks to a \$10,255 federal Justice Assistance Grant.

The APLR system uses cameras mounted both in

patrol cars and at locations throughout the City. License plates that pass the cameras are recorded at the rate of about 1 per second (and can be recorded even when cars are traveling at 100 MPH), any time of the day or night.

If the plate is associated with a stolen vehicle or criminal activity, that information is sent to patrol officers and the Central Communication Center.

Using this technology, BYPD has been able to arrest individuals suspected in burglaries, robberies and handgun violence. This grant will be used to improve one of the in-car systems.

