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Loreto students and City Council come to town

by Eric Michael Stitt

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This last week, Hermosa Beach not only welcomed a dozen students with chaperones from its sister city, Loreto, Mexico, but also the town's City Council members in order to strengthen the program that's now more than 40 years old.

Usually only Loreto's students visit for a week, but this time its entire City Council joined the visit to Hermosa Beach, because there is a completely new staff and they all wanted to learn more about the Sister City program that started in 1967.

Hermosa Beach Mayor J.R. Reviczky thought it was a great idea.

"We wanted to discuss the Sister City program," Reviczky said. "There is a lot of new people and we thought it would be good if they came up to boost the Sister City program ... I think it's extremely important to the students and community of Hermosa Beach."

Reviczky said four Hermosa Beach City Council members went to Loreto in 1997, so this was the first time a large portion of this council got to visit with Loreto's.

The council members discussed the program's history, what Loreto officials would like to incorporate, and also talked about the student exchange program and the special relationship between both cities' fire departments.

Deborah Wright-DeMaderios, president of the Hermosa Beach Sister City Association, said everyone from Loreto had a wonderful time visiting Hermosa Beach and the surrounding area.

"It's a cultural exchange (and) we've made lifelong friends," she said.

HBSCA members scheduled trips for the students that took up the entire week. The trips involved Disneyland, Lazer Tag, barbeques, ice skating, shopping and a day at a local water park, said HBSCA past president Pat Love.

Hermosa Beach students visited Loreto during their spring break as part of the student exchange portion so this was their chance to let Loreto students experience the Southern California culture, said Superintendent Sharon McClain.

"We're very excited they're here and we're delighted to offer our hospitality the same way they did to our students," McClain said. "I hope we'll keep this relationship for many years."

McClain went to Loreto with the Hermosa Beach students last spring, and said she had a wonderful time and thought it was a great experience for all the children.

"This is very beneficial to all students of the United States and Mexico. I think it's a wonderful program. I'm happy our students have this opportunity," McClain said.

Also a part of the Sister City program is the Hermosa Beach Fire Department's effort to train Loreto firefighters to be paramedics and provide much-needed equipment for their department.

Over the years the HBSCA has been able to provide four ambulances, five EKG monitor defibrillators, the Jaws of Life, a pickup truck with lights and a siren, and traction splints, among many other items. Meanwhile Hermosa Beach firefighters have traveled to Loreto to teach paramedics.

Wright-DeMaderios said the Loreto fire chief was also able to make the trip to Hermosa Beach and participated in a ride-along with Hermosa Beach firefighters to help strengthen their relationship.

Wright-DeMaderios said she is very pleased with the effort by Loreto and Hermosa Beach officials to acknowledge the importance of this program. It should make the Sister City Association's future just as successful as its past, she said.