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New SJ Program Teaches Kids to be Street Smart

San José, California – A new program that teaches school children how to cross the street safely and the correct way to wear a bike helmet and ride a bike was formally launched today by San José Mayor Ron Gonzales.

Stop. Look left, right, left, front and back. Make eye contact with the driver before stepping into the crosswalk. These are examples of messages that the San José Department of Transportation will be teaching school kids to help keep them safe when interacting with traffic, whether they are walking or on a bike.

The ultimate goal of the new Street Smarts School Safety Education Program, developed by the City of San José and funded by a two-year, \$230,000 grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, is to reduce child pedestrian- and bicycle-related injuries and fatalities in San José through traffic safety education.

“The safety of our children getting to school is essential so they can learn in school,” said Mayor Gonzales. “Teaching schoolchildren how to be safe on the streets will help reduce traffic accidents with pedestrians and bicycles. Even with our city’s excellent traffic safety ranking among big cities, we can always do better to save lives.”

San José has the second lowest pedestrian fatality rate among large U.S. cities, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Report on Pedestrian Roadway Fatalities.

“This program provides additional tools for the City of San José to promote increased bicycle and pedestrian safety,” said Sunne Wright McPeak, Secretary of the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, which oversees the Office of Traffic Safety. “The end result is that it will save lives.”

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All too often, children are subjected to speeding cars, congestion, double-parking and blocked crosswalks, creating a consistently chaotic environment around schools. The City's new safety education program will teach behaviors that will help keep kids safe, beginning at an early age, in this type of environment.

The City is also hoping to enlist the children's help in extending these safety messages to others, namely parents. Each presentation concludes with the instructor "deputizing" the kids by asking them to raise their right hand and promise to teach their parents and friends about the safety behaviors they learned in the program.

The Street Smarts School Safety Education Program is expected to serve about one-half of all public elementary and middle school students each year, reaching an estimated 100,000 children in two years through presentations, bike rodeos and interactive programs that promote safe walking and bicycling behaviors.

The launch of this new program coincides with "School Safety Month in San José," designated by Council Proclamation earlier in January to raise community awareness about the need to improve safety for some of the most vulnerable members of our community – children - in and around schools.

The School Safety Education Program is a new element of Street Smarts, a public education program launched by the City several years ago to address driver, pedestrian and bicyclist behavior. For more information visit: www.GetStreetSmarts.org.

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