

# The CAO Weekly Report

The week of February 2, 2015



## *Monterey County Administrative Office*

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In this edition:

- Parks, museum garden project earns state award
- County staffers step up to help with community tax help program



## Museum, County Parks Project Receives State Honor

An international agriculture education program linking students in south Monterey County and Honduras has been singled out by the California Association of Museums for its prestigious Superintendent's Award for Excellence in Museum Education. This award recognizes outstanding achievements in California museum programs that serve K-12 students and/or educators.

The Common Ground Garden Project, which is located at the County's San Lorenzo Park in King City and is a special international program run by The Monterey County Agricultural and Rural Life Museum (MCARLM), was selected for the award - one of only six museums from throughout the state to be honored.

MCARLM's Executive Director, Jessica Potts will receive the award at a conference this month.

"We are honored to receive this award and look forward to furthering environmental stewardship through this exceptional program," she says.



Students in the Common Ground program learn about all aspects of organic gardening, including worms!

The Common Ground Garden is located at Monterey County's San Lorenzo Park in King City, which is the home of MCARLM.

The program was initiated in 2013 with partner organizations, the Greenfield Community Science Workshop (GCSW) and the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE). Common Ground serves middle-school students in Greenfield and King City, teaching students how to be responsible stewards of the earth through an immersive organic gardening program.

Students meet after school at GCSW and on weekends at the garden, following specific lessons provided by the UCCE's youth gardening curriculum. UCCE Master Gardeners serve as mentors for the program.

In 2014, Common Ground was expanded through a Museums Connect grant, a program made possible through the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Through Museums Connect, MCARLM partnered with the Casa K'inich Children's Museum in Copan, Honduras. Together the two museums are working on Common Ground gardens in their respective countries,



Students in Greenfield talk to their counterparts in Honduras via Skype this week about the garden project and much more. Students say they were surprised to find out how much they have in common with their new friends in Honduras.

with emphasis on the importance of environmental stewardship both locally and globally. Students share their experiences as pen pals and through Skype chats, one of which happened just this week! At the end of the program, the students and museum will publish a cookbook of family recipes using vegetables from their gardens.

You can see what the California Association of Museums says about the Common Ground program [here](#) as well as see the other winners of this award. Because the award was for museum education programs, the winners were chosen by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson.



## Tax Assistance Program Gets Help from County Staff

Today, Friday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, the United Way Monterey County launched its annual free tax assistance program, VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance).

This program has a lot of support at the County. Besides having members of the Board of Supervisors and county executives on hand for the kick-off, each year county staff volunteer their time helping others file their tax returns.

VITA is designed for those with limited income. They are assisted by trained volunteers who provide free tax preparation help.

Last year, about a dozen county staff members volunteered for VITA, and they made a huge impact, contributing to completing more than 2,000 tax returns worth more than \$2.5 million!

This year, nine county workers have signed on so far, some of them returning for their second and third year. They are:

Carlos Gomez, Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office  
Maggie Orozco, Department of Social Services  
Christina Campbell, Department of Child Support Services  
Irene Garza, Department of Social Services  
Ruth Solis, Department of Social Services  
Maria Villasenor, Department of Social Services  
Dee Guerrero, Department of Social Services  
Veronica Renteria, Department of Social Services  
Victoria Davis, Department of Child Support Services



Victoria Davis (left) and Veronica Renteria (right) are volunteering with the VITA program again this year.

You can find out more about VITA [here](#) including locations, dates and times for tax preparation assistance and for assistance available online.

