

## Earth Day celebrated at Chino-area wetlands

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Earth Day is celebrated everywhere. And one of the most picturesque places and likely one of the least well known celebrations occurred in Chino last week.

The Chino Creek Wetlands and Educational Park, played host to tours of school children and various adult visitors who toured the grounds to learn about water conservation and environmental protection.

The wetlands house the Inland Empire Utilities Agency, and at first glance it's hard to believe a municipal water district office is surrounded by so much natural, indigenous beauty.

Tom Love, general manager, Inland Empire Utilities Agency, said the event takes a while to plan each year.

"It takes about six months," he said. "The intense effort begins about two months before the event."

The Earth Day celebration had about 50 volunteers helping out with the booths and tours.

"Every one of the booths is set up to educate children," Love explained.

One booth housed a game called, "Water Conservation Jeopardy." Participants who correctly answered questions regarding various aspects of water and water conservation could choose from prizes such as snap bracelets, rulers and pencils.

Directly in front of the Jeopardy booth, one of the utilities agency employees showed off a seven-week-old male owl he rescued.

He talked about rescuing the finding the owl in a nest that had been destroyed. The employee talked to visitors about owls and their basic habits. He decided to name this particular great horned owl Archimedes.

Archimedes will be released back into the wild once he is old enough to fend for himself. At only seven weeks, he is already quite large.

Andrea Carruthers, community outreach and education coordinator for the utilities agency, said the yearly event is largely to educate the public about water conservation and other environmental protection concerns.

"Basically (the event) serves as a way to bring the community in and teach them about our natural resources and how to protect them," Carruthers said.

This year's Earth Day celebration allowed students to have the exclusive run of the park from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.. From 3 to 6 p.m., the wetlands were opened up to the public, Carruthers said.

Many of the vendors consisted of water companies, landscapers and county and city agencies, she said.

For instance, the city of Upland assisted the agency by providing volunteers to work the event which was spread over the 22 acres of the wetlands.

One of the parks attractions is the Interpretive Center, said Lucia Diaz, senior site administrator for the agency.

The center opened in 2008, Diaz said.

"It helps give the public a chance to see what types of animals you find in the local natural habitat."

A man who goes by the moniker "Hawk Guy" was stationed under the shade of a tent with two different birds of prey on perches.

Visitors had a chance to ask him questions about his birds and Southern California hawks in general.

The Earth Day event was partially funded through a grant from the state Department of Parks and Recreation, according to information from the agency.

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