

**Joint - Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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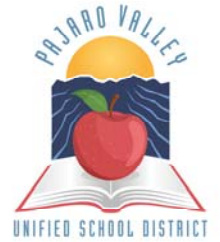
**Contacto:**

PVUSD: [Alicia G. Jiménez](#)

Public Information Officer, (831) 786-2114

CHT: [Nelly B. Otsu](#)

Marketing and Communications Manager, (831) 726-4260



**Joint Press Release - PVUSD and Community Health Trust:  
PVUSD's Culinary Kitchen and Teaching Garden Grant Project at Starlight Elementary Receives  
Major Donation from Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley**

Watsonville, CA - The word is out! A Culinary Kitchen and Teaching Garden (CKTG) garden will open in 2022 at Starlight Elementary School, one of only five schools nationwide - and the only school west of the Rockies- thanks to major funding from the Emeril Lagasse Foundation (chef, ELF), PVUSD developer fees, the Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley (CHT), community donors, foundations and grants. Starlight's Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students will explore science, math, health, nutrition, and other subjects through hands-on projects that also teach teamwork, critical thinking, planning, and problem-solving; skills to support their success in school, careers, and in life. CHT's \$150,000 donation anchors the CKTG project as a promise to positively impact the wellbeing of PVUSD students, families, and the community for years to come.

“The significance of Emeril’s Culinary Garden and Teaching Kitchen in our community will be profound,” says Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, PVUSD Superintendent of Schools. She noted that many of the almost 600 students at Starlight are the children of farmworkers who sow, harvest, and package the food that feeds our region and the nation. “This expansive new garden and teaching kitchen facility will bring very meaningful new curriculum and hands-on experiences to our students,” Dr. Rodriguez added. “The impacts will extend far beyond the classroom.”

PVUSD received the \$500,000 Emeril Lagasse Foundation grant award in January 2020 and is now in the stages of design and planning for the construction at the Starlight campus. Conversations to garner community support for the project resounded deeply with leadership at the CHT resulting in a significant anchor gift of \$150,000. DeAndre James, CHT Executive Director, explains that this project is clearly aligned with the Community Health Trust goals, “As long time partners of PVUSD, we are proud to support this new program that directly aligns with our vision for a healthy community. Our young people deserve access to the highest level of health and wellness and this project teaches them where their food comes from, how to cultivate it, and how to prepare it, along with essential life skills that will help them be healthier now and in the future.”

CHT has supported PVUSD health career and scholarship programs for many years. This next level of investment will allow ‘whole child’ education to take root. The Lagasse grant aligns directly with PVUSD’s focus on expanding the vision and meaning of student success and the health and nutrition focus makes it a perfect partner for CHT, an agency dedicated to promoting health and wellness in our community. PVUSD will build upon this impactful donation to secure additional funds for the construction of this community resource.

Starlight, led by Principal Jaclynne Medina, is a school with an educational equity focus. The project will build upon the long-standing garden education program and strong family and community involvement at the school. Emeril’s Culinary Garden and Teaching Kitchen will be a permanent, fully equipped 1,543 sq ft teaching

Amesti \* Ann Soldo \* Bradley \* Calabasas \* Diamond Technology Institute \* Freedom \* H.A. Hyde \* Hall District \* Landmark \* MacQuiddy \* Mar Vista \* Mintie White \* Ohlone \* Radcliff \* Rio Del Mar \* Starlight \* Valencia \* Aptos Jr. High \* Cesar E. Chavez \* E.A. Hall \* Lakeview \* Pajaro Middle \* Rolling Hills \* Aptos High \* Pajaro Valley High \* Pajaro Valley Virtual Academy \* Watsonville High \* Renaissance High \* New School \* Alianza Charter \* Pacific Coast Charter \* Watsonville Charter School of the Arts \* Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education

kitchen, an adjacent 5,600 sq ft organic garden, and a 2,300 sq ft community gathering area on the campus of Starlight.

The addition of a new culinary garden and newly manufactured modular classroom will serve as a dedicated teaching kitchen. The innovative curriculum for the project was written exclusively for the Emeril Lagasse Foundation by Life Lab, integrating health, wellness, and nutrition-based experiential learning with core curriculum. Classroom academics in science, math and language arts are merged with practical and life skills that are culturally relevant to PVUSD students and their families, emphasizing the power of personal choices in health and wellness, and helping students explore how their interests and talents can grow into successful careers in the Pajaro Valley.

For further information or to interview Dr. Rodriguez directly, contact PVUSD Public Information Officer, Alicia Jimenez via the contact information above.

For further information or to interview Mr. James directly, contact CHT Marketing and Communications Manager, Nelly Otsu via the contact information above.

**About Pajaro Valley Unified School District:** Pajaro Valley Unified School District is dedicated to creating educational equity for students, families and communities we serve. PVUSD serves almost 20,000 students: 82% are Latino, 16% are White, 65% are English Language learners, and 78% qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. The district has sixteen elementary schools, six middle/junior high schools, three comprehensive high schools, nine charter/alternative schools and one Virtual Academy. The 2,430 Administration, Classified and Certificated staff members are dedicated to ensuring that all of our students can reach their greatness. At the center of our Target for Student Success is the belief that our students must leave our schools college, career and life ready. Visit us at [www.pvUSD.net](http://www.pvUSD.net).

**About Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley:** Founded in 1998 and serving a tri county area, the Community Health Trust is recognized for its leadership as a convener in the South Santa Cruz County area. CHT is motivated to foster an equitable Pajaro Valley with health, wellness and a full quality of life for all through access to resources, activities, and choices that help prevent illness and improve quality of life. Find us online at [www.pyhealthtrust.org](http://www.pyhealthtrust.org)