

Here's to teamwork

AbilityFirst joins forces with area Scouts to help kids with disabilities

BY EMILY GRILLY
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Boys Scouts and Cub Scouts from throughout the Valley have been doing their part to promote interaction between kids with and without disabilities.

The Paul Weston Center in Woodland Hills, which serves people of all ages with physical and emotional disabilities, has been working with the Scouts on two different projects, said Jeff Richards, new director of the center.

In one project, Boy Scouts from Troop 464, based in Woodland Hills/Calabasas, helped with improvements at the center. In the other project, Cub Scouts from throughout the Valley attended a weeklong camp at the center, taking part in activities with children with disabilities.

The Paul Weston Center, located at 6530 Winnetka Ave., is part of a Southern California nonprofit corporation called AbilityFirst.

Boy Scout Riley Alexander, who is pursuing his Eagle rank, contacted the center and asked what he and his troop could do.

"The Scouts were willing to do whatever we asked them," Richards said. "The center was going through a renovation, so we were very grateful for their help."

One of the improvement projects was restoring a structure used to store playground equipment. The other was prepping an area to become

what's called a Sensory Wall. It will have different colored lights, a section featuring phrases in Braille and an odor box that will give off different smells such as banana, bubble gum and lemon, Richards said.

The wall is designed to stimulate all the senses and provide an interesting activity for disabled kids, he said, adding that he hopes the wall will be completed this fall.

Cub Scouts from the Las Colinas District, which covers the San Fernando Valley, took part in a weeklong camp at the center earlier this month. The camp had a medieval theme.

Earlier this year, several Cub Scout camp directors approached Richards to see if they could use the center for their annual summer day camp. After a lot of discussion, they began making plans to bring the Cub Scouts and kids served by AbilityFirst together for five days of activities including archery, water activities, puppet shows, singing and jousting with poles that had rubber tips, Richard said. They also "feasted" on chicken drumsticks.

The Cub Scouts' ages ranged from 9 to 13, and the AbilityFirst participants ranged from 5 to 20 years old.

"AbilityFirst definitely hopes this camp will become an annual festivity," Richards said.

AbilityFirst officials are trying to expand the project to create similar interactive programs at its five other centers, he added.



Local Cub Scouts joined kids with disabilities for a weeklong camp at the Paul Weston Center in Woodland Hills, where they took part in activities such as archery.