



Riverside County Children & Families Commission

A public entity funded from Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First 5 Riverside Honors Longtime Champions for Children

(APRIL 20, 2009) RIVERSIDE, CA — Firsts and child advocacy are synonymous with Jean M. Benson, so her involvement with First 5 Riverside efforts since its inception was a natural fit.

At its next meeting, which occurs during the Week of the Young Child (April 19-25), First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, will recognize Benson for her leadership and devotion to children. The Palm Desert resident recently resigned from the Commission due to health reasons.

“Along with expertise in bringing communities together for children, Jean brought enthusiasm and passion for children and family issues to the Commission,” said Stella Smith, First 5 Riverside’s deputy director. “She was like the grandmother of First 5 Riverside.”

Benson served as a First 5 Riverside advisory committee member starting in 1999, shortly after the Commission was formed. During those early years, she was instrumental in organizing community forums, which helped the Commission determine priorities for funding. In 2004, she was appointed to the Commission, serving as its chair from 2005 to 2008 and contributing to revisions to the Commission’s strategic plan.

“Her determination to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families was unmistakable,” said Harry Freedman, executive director of First 5 Riverside.

Benson, Palm Desert’s first female councilmember and mayor, is no stranger to community service. Her list of memberships past and present is long and includes the Coachella Valley Child Care Council, Angel View Crippled Children’s Foundation and the YMCA Child Care Fund Drive. She has had a child care center named after her and the City of Palm Desert recently signed a proclamation calling April 22, the same day as the Commission meeting, Jean M. Benson Day.

On April 22, the Commission will present Benson with an award. She will share the spotlight with former deputy county counsel Lucy Furuta, who retired last month. Furuta was assigned to the Commission in 1999 and was instrumental in developing and implementing the initial structure of the Commission and its advisory committee. The Commission will honor Furuta for her years of commitment, devotion and contributions to building a strong foundation of ethics and professional conduct.

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First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, is a public entity funded by Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues and established by the County Board of Supervisors in 1999. First 5 Riverside provides funding of early education, health and child care services that help children through age 5 develop a strong foundation for success in school and throughout their lives. For more information about First 5 Riverside programs and other funded services, call 951-248-0014 or Toll Free 800-266-3880 or visit www.rccfc.org.