# Federal education officials visit Journey School

U.S. Department of Education, EPA, USDA officials pay a visit to Aliso Viejo charter.

By KELLIE MEJDRICH ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Aliso Viejo's Journey School welcomed federal education and environmental officials Monday to show them just what being a Green Ribbon school is all about.

Hint: It involves pruning fruit trees, composting, making your own fig jam, baking bread and building bows and arrows out of yucfibers and willow branches.

At least that's how it goes at Journey School, the first school in Orange County to win a U.S. Department of Education 2013 Green Ribbon Award. It's an honor that recognizes schools for creating healthy learning spaces that emphasize reducing effects on the envi-



**Journey School Executive Director Shaheer Faltas** greets a tour group at the Aliso Viejo school Monday.

U.S. Department of Edu-Green Ribbon Schools Director Andrea Suarez Falken was joined by representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as board trustees from the Capistrano Unified School District, on the visit as part of a tri-state tour this week that included stops at 16 Green Ribbon awardees in California, Oregon and Washington.

The trip continues the department's Education Built to Last Facilities Best Practices tour started earli-



PHOTOS: MINDY SCHAUER, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Seth Whiteaker, 11, a sixth-grade student, greets Andrea Suarez Falken with the U.S. Department of Education on Monday. Falken was part of a group with the "Education **Built To Last" Facilities Best Practices tour.** 

country tour to "see and discuss ways school facilities can enhance the conditions of learning," a department news release said.

Aliso Viejo was in the middle of a cluster of honorees in Southern California, including Longfellow Elementary School and Charles Evans Hughes Middle School, both in Long Beach. Faculty and parent volunguided visitors through the school's six they gardens, where learned about curriculum related to sustainability, in-

cluding the use of native edible and medicinal plants, rainwater harvesting, and cooking the food they grow. The tour ended with a spread of food cooked and prepared by the students including bread, crackers, fig jam and scones.

Journey, a K-8 public charter, emphasizes a Waldorf curriculum, an educational philosophy based on the work of Austrian philosopher Rudolph Steiner. The school's curriculum emphasizes, among other things, "a holistic educational picture" focused on "development of the intellect, social-emotional wellbeing, and physical capabilities of each student," the school's charter explains.

Falken said she was impressed by the maturity of the students, and she hopes other schools can take note.

"It's a fantastic mélange of sustainability and Waldorf practices, and the community engagement is evident," she said. "But what struck me is the students, though. They're really mature and articulate as high school students, easily. They've got fantastic life skills."

Sierra Stewart, Julia Dye, Jade Jang and Georgia Bennett, all 11 years old, gave a presentation in the school's mini-orchard of 30 donated fruit trees on how students prune the trees to help them grow while learning about plant diseases and pests with the help of Master Gardener Erik Katzmaier with the Orange County Master Gardeners. Those kinds of partnerships - with master gardeners, parents and nonprofits Earthroots Field School - are what make the eco-literacy program come together, school officials

During the presentation, Bennett demonstrated how to prune a peach tree. Afterward, the three cheered her on for her work.

"I'm up there sweating, it's so hot!" she exclaimed to the laughs of her classmates, wiping sweat from her brow.

"But it looks good!" Stew-

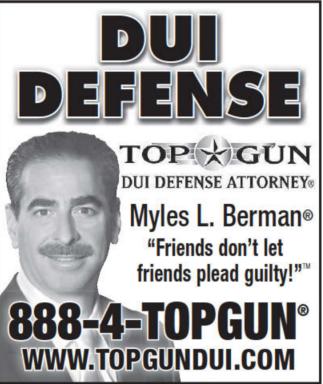
"Yeah, and you get the benefit of fresh fruit," Jang said, adding that the plants produce oxygen for them to breathe

For parent Brad Southard, who has two children at Journey and volunteers regularly at the garden, the school gives his kids a vital opportunity to learn and grow in unique ways.

"We actually moved to Aliso Viejo for this school," Southard said. "It gives our kids a community in which they're allowed to be children for longer. There's not a lot of talk about what TV shows they're watching, for example ... the school offers a little oasis from that, and there's a whole community that's like-minded."

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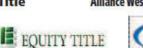














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