



Rialto Fire, RUSD Elementary Schools bring back Drowning Prevention Program and Stewie!

April 4, 2025 – Rialto, CA – “Stewie” is back!!

Rialto Unified School District (RUSD) and the Rialto Fire Department (RFD) are thrilled to partner in the highly anticipated return of the successful drowning prevention education initiative, *“Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim.”*

On **April 9, 8:30 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.** Rialto Fire Dept., *Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim*, drowning prevention program will commence with a kickoff celebration at Levin A. Bemis Elementary School, located at 774 East Etiwanda Avenue in Rialto. This event marks the revival of a vital educational effort aimed at enhancing water safety awareness among our youngest learners. The program was first introduced over 15 years ago in the RUSD by Rialto Fire, after Rialto accounted for nearly 50 percent of fatal drownings in San Bernardino County between 2005-2006. On average, there were six to seven fatal drownings in the City, with 13-14 near-drownings a year, according to the RFD.

“This was a very important program for our young RUSD scholars. The Bemis ‘Bobcats’ are excited and ready to host the kick-off on April 9th, and I am sure the students will gain water-safety knowledge and enjoy seeing Stewie,” said **Dr. Monte Stewart**, Principal of Bemis Elementary School.

Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim imparts essential water safety lessons through engaging storytelling and interactive activities tailored for first-grade students. Rialto firefighters and paramedics will visit all RUSD elementary schools to read and discuss the book, and then offer hands-on experiences such as a tour of the fire truck. The program, in partnership with RFD and District’s Community Engagement, will also feature a special appearance by *Stewie the Duck*, enhancing the excitement and engagement of Rialto USD first-grade students.

“Teaching water safety is an important part of our broader commitment to student safety and well-being,” said **Dr. Judy D. White**, Interim Superintendent. “The ‘Stewie the Duck’ program helps our young students learn essential safety skills while also building awareness and responsibility around water. In partnership with the Rialto Fire Department, we’re excited to bring this engaging program to our schools. The Board of Education remains dedicated to creating a safe and supportive learning environment by championing initiatives like this that help protect our students in and out of the classroom.”

Ryan Cathey, Rialto Fire Department Battalion Chief, who, with the support of Rialto Fire Chief **Brian Park**, will coordinate the return of this Drowning Prevention program. Battalion Chief Cathey stated, “We are thrilled to launch the *Stewie the Duck Learn to Swim* program again thanks to the amazing partnership between Rialto Fire Department and Rialto Unified School District! Together, we are helping our community’s children gain essential water safety skills earlier in life. Let’s make a splash!”

For more information about “Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim” or to arrange future media visits, please contact RUSD’s Communications Director, Syeda Jafri, at (909) 820-7700, ext. 2126.

