

# SAN CLEMENTE

## SUN POST NEWS



KEN STEINHARDT, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

U.S. Olympic volleyball player Brian Thornton talks with children who attend Concordia Elementary School in San Clemente as they participate in International Walk to School Day. Thornton grew up in San Clemente and attended Concordia Elementary.

# WALKING TALL

OLYMPIC VOLLEYBALL PLAYER RETURNS TO CONCORDIA  
ELEMENTARY FOR WALK TO SCHOOL DAY. **PAGE 6**

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# Olympian stands tall on Walk to School Day

By **FRED SWEGLES**  
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

One figure stood tall among the swarm of 4-foot-6-inch students who walked to Concordia Elementary School as part of Wednesday's observance of International Walk to School Day in San Clemente.

Joining the kids in crossing a foot-bridge over I-5 and on to the campus was 6-foot-3 Brian Thornton, a setter for the U.S. Olympic men's volleyball team.

Once, he was one of them. This day, he was there to inspire them.

"I rode my bike to school ... almost every day," Thornton said, recalling the years in the 1990s when he attended Concordia Elementary from kindergarten through sixth grade. Now 27, he is back from competing in the London Olympics and is preparing for winter-league pro volleyball in Europe.

On Wednesday, he donated one of his jerseys from the Olympics to his former school and talked about the importance of being active.



It wasn't hard for Concordia Elementary to arrange for Thornton to visit because his mother, Colleen Nufer, teaches fifth grade there.

Every year, Concordia celebrates International Walk to School Day in October and National Bike to School Day in May. But it's not like the kids really need

**During International Walk to School Day, Concordia Elementary School students walk over I-5 in San Clemente on a pedestrian bridge, led by U.S. Olympic volleyball player Brian Thornton, who attended Concordia through sixth grade.**

KEN STEINHARDT, THE  
ORANGE COUNTY  
REGISTER

to be nudged.

Through the school's Walk and Roll program, not using a car is part of the culture among 659 students and their parents.

"Every day is Walk and Roll Day at Concordia," Principal Dave Gerhard told a crowd assembled on the blacktop to start the school day. He had just ridden

his bicycle to school from Dana Point.

"It's fun. It's healthy. It's better for your town. It keeps cars off the road. It's better for the environment," said Ellie Hammargren, a parent who started the Walk and Roll program in 2007. "It keeps the streets safer and gets the kids healthier and wakes their brains up in the morning. It's not as hard as people think it is."

Hammargren is a cycling advocate and is one of several parents who forms ride pools to school.

"Every year we get more cyclists," she said. "People are realizing that if you live too far to walk, you can still ride."

Brooke Chambers, a parent who rides to school with her kids, had her children hand out Velvet Yogurt coupons to walkers as they stepped on campus Wednesday.

Just before the festivities, student Brock Penna, 9, scored an autograph from Thornton and excitedly ran to show it to his classmates lined up on the blacktop. "Pretty cool!" he said.

See more photos at [ocregister.com/sanclemente](http://ocregister.com/sanclemente).

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