

Calling all pollinators

LP-A Elementary students plant 1,100 seedlings at their school

By Vicki Gerdes
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This past Wednesday, May 29, students at Lake Park-Audubon Elementary School in Audubon spent the morning digging holes and planting seedlings in the soil on the school's south lawn, with the intent of transforming it into a large pollinator garden.

LP-A sixth graders took turns mentoring their younger counterparts in grades K-5, who came out to the new garden in waves throughout the morning. By about 1 p.m., more than 1,100 seedlings had been planted there, with a little help from Becker Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff as well as members of the Pine to Prairie Chapter of Pheasants Forever.

"Altogether, we had nine different conservation organizations working with us on this project," said LP-A sixth grade teacher Katie O'Connell. "It's been a year in the planning."

Though the school already had a small pollinator garden, converted from a flower and vegetable garden that was installed there about three years ago, it has now been expanded to encompass much of the school's south lawn, adjacent to the greenhouse that was built there in 2017-18.

The greenhouse project was funded by a \$10,000 grant from the Monsanto Fund's "America's Farmers Grow Rural Educa-

tion" program, and constructed by students in Cole Wixo's construction trades class at LP-A High School.

O'Connell said the school has received "multiple grants and donations" to complete its garden project, including funding from Audubon Dakota, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Minnesota Ag in the Classroom, Friends of the Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District, Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society, Cormorant Sportsman's Club and Longspur Prairie Fund as well as the aforementioned Becker SWCD and Pheasants Forever.

In addition, the Minnesota Horticultural Society recently supplied the school with 10 garden boxes, which were planted by the sixth graders earlier this month. The garden boxes will be tended by LP-A summer school students, then harvested by incoming sixth graders in the fall. The harvested vegetables will then be used by the school staff to prepare meals for the students.

O'Connell said that the sixth graders also took the lead on the pollinator garden project, choosing which plants and seeds to install as well as mentoring the younger grades during the planting process.

"The Becker SWCD provided them with resources and guidance," she added, "but this has been their project."

Becker SWCD Resource



(Vicki Gerdes / Tribune)

The gardens on the south side of Lake Park-Audubon School in Audubon were significantly expanded this week, thanks to funding from Becker SWCD and a variety of other area conservation groups.

Technician Logan Riedel said that O'Connell had reached out to his office about a year and a half ago, after seeing one of the agency's Facebook posts about native plants.

"We were able to use some of our cost share money (through the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment) to help purchase plants and materials for them," he said.

Riedel and some of his fellow SWCD staff members also came to the sixth graders' classroom to talk with them about site preparation and designing a site plan for the pollinator garden.

"They were able to pick out the plants they wanted," Riedel said, based on what varieties were native to the area as well as which ones would be best suited for conditions in various parts of the garden (sunshine, shade, soil type and saturation levels, etc.).

This past Tuesday, the SWCD staff was on hand to help prepare the soil and seed it with native grasses. Then, an erosion control straw matting was placed over the freshly seeded soil, and on Tuesday, the students, teach-

ers, SWCD staff and volunteers spent the morning digging down through the straw matting and soil to plant the native seedlings.

"We're planting just over 1,100 plants, about two feet apart," Riedel said.

"This looks so amaz-

ing!" O'Connell said Wednesday morning when she came out with her students to check out the site. "It's been great to include all the grades... getting kids excited about nature and protecting our pollinators, that's been the goal of this whole project."

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Jesse Peterson (left), Holden Krause and Harper Bach share smiles as Krause shows the younger students he's mentoring how to plant a new seedling in the soil at LP-A Elementary's new pollinator garden.



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