

Winfield's Community Outdoor Classroom

“Can we come back tomorrow?” That was the plea made by fifth grade student, Kevin Aldridge, after spending 30 minutes digging holes in Bed One of Winfield's new Outdoor Community Classroom. The holes were for the prairie plugs being planted by his fellow students on the east lawn of the Winfield Public School along Winfield Road under adult supervision.

Yes, on April 30 work began on this educational site which will showcase native prairie and woodland flowers and grasses as forms of vegetation beneficial to the environment. The purpose of the project is threefold: education, beautification and cooperation.

Project leader Phoebe Smith of Winfield United for a Better Community explains that there is a growing awareness in schools and government circles that children of this generation are suffering from disconnect with nature. “Technology has great benefits, but it has kept many youngsters indoors. When asked to participate in planting, many children are at first stand-offish seeing direct contact with soil and plants as something foreign. But little by little the kids break through the barrier of the unknown and literally dig in. Plant plugs are teased out of containers, roots are spread, plants placed carefully into holes. Knees and hands contact soil, and kids are again connected to nature. This work isn't work; it is fun! And it feels great as an adult volunteer to share the fun with them.”

Likewise, the school's student council planted a white oak, state tree of Illinois. The tree, which was planted by the student council members under the direction of Chris Mest of Graf Tree Care, was dedicated to the council which voted to contribute \$200 towards the project.

By the end of the first 10 days of planting, 160 students and adult volunteers had helped and many more have been scheduled for the second week. The team of organizers and other volunteers will continue to work through the summer and fall with more students. A great final result is expected: four demonstration beds, various native trees, interpretive signs and viewing benches to serve the entire public. Birds, butterflies and less carbon in the air to follow!

The Community Outdoor Classroom team wishes to thank the following supporters who have donated funding, plant materials, and/or their time and expertise: Winfield Public School PTO and Student Council, Wild Ones Native Landscapers, The Conservation Foundation, The Morton Arboretum, Gov. Pat Quinn's Office, Roger Kotecki, Deb Adams, Target, Prosek's Nursery, Planter's Palette, Scheffler's, Midwest Groundcover LLC, Midwest Trading Horticultural Supplies, Graf Tree Care, Cantigny, Pizzo and Associates, Red Buffalo Nursery, Possibility Place Nursery, Winfield Junior Woman's Club, Main Street, Winfield Area Gardeners, Winfield United for a Better Community, and all volunteers and student planters.

We are looking forward to your visit in the near future to Winfield's Community Outdoor Classroom, located at the corner of Winfield Road and Beecher Street.