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THE RYE RECORD

NEWS OF RYE AND ITS PEOPLE

Really Growing Green at Milton School

– By Bill Lawyer –

Being a “locavore” is becoming a lot easier in Rye these days. Milton School recently joined along with Osborn and Midland in establishing school vegetable gardens. Now, instead of saying “the dog ate my homework,” kids can say that they ate their homework.



Thanks to the hard work and enthusiasm of parents and teachers, students are learning about the wonders of vegetables and fruits. Inspired by the newly established White House garden, Milton School students are planning to celebrate their spring harvest with an “Obama Salad Party” the week of June 15.

While Milton School doesn’t have quite as prime a location as Midland School’s courtyard, its two-bed garden, located behind the cafeteria, gets great sunlight much of the day. During the last weeks of May, students have been transplanting their seedlings from the classrooms to the outdoor beds.

Milton’s efforts grew out of the leadership of PTO environmental and wellness chairs Mimi Bateman and Lisa Urban, and their co-chairs Jeanine Scott and Jami Patterson. They worked with interested teachers and parents to start a pilot program for selected second-, third- and fifth-grade classes.

As the school’s major renovation and expansion project was coming to an end, the six- person garden group visited school gardens around the county, developed curriculum and lesson plans, established a budget for supplies and equipment, and began fund-raising activities.



All their hard work is paying off. They raised over \$2,000, including a grant of \$1,000 from the Rye YMCA. They got “in kind” donations of time and equipment from Rye landscape architects Chris Cohan and Betsy Gallagher, and Scarsdale-based school garden developer Russell Greenleaf.

Thus, by March of this year, all the elements were assembled to get the garden program “in the ground”. They had the seed beds, seeds, trowels, gloves, kneeling pads, watering cans, as well as

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garden journals to keep records of what they did, what they expected would happen, and what actually happened. As all gardeners know, no amount of study can take the place of experience.

Using lesson plans developed by parents Jeanine Scott and Jami Patterson, the volunteer teachers met with the classes every week to introduce the project concepts and start growing the vegetables. Twelve parents helped with the classes.

As with Rye's other elementary school gardens, students learn about more than just the botanical aspect of garden plants. They learn about soils, earth science, astronomy (how the sun "changes its course" throughout the year), ecosystems (which wild animals and invertebrates are likely to feed at the garden), nutrition, math, and the scientific method.

Units were geared toward the specific grade levels, but children in all grades had the opportunity to help with the planting and tending of the gardens.

They are learning from their failures as well as their successes. They've found that the natural light in some classrooms is much better for growing than others. They're still working on ways to "pest proof" the gardens.

In looking ahead, Milton's parents and teachers are hoping to expand their program to include all grades, following in the footsteps of Midland's efforts. Developed by parent Sheri DeGraw, the Midland garden program is part of an overall outdoor classroom project, which has a weather station, a butterfly garden, tables with benches, and tree stump seats. The courtyard classroom is even used for second-grade science lessons on map-making.

In addition to growing spring vegetables, the Midland garden has strawberries and blueberry bushes, along with a variety of plants, such as squash, that won't be harvested until fall.

The courtyard classroom space is in such demand that teachers have to sign up in advance to reserve their "green time."

Midland's garden/courtyard was recently approved as a National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat – thus providing support for wildlife as well as people.

The big question is, what will be the impact of school garden projects, as children grow older. Will homegrown vegetables be a part of their lives? Will they and their families patronize local farmers' markets?

Ms. Bateman is confident that the Obama Party will be a success. "Studies show that kids are more likely to eat vegetables if they've helped grow them."
Bon appétit!