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Outdoor classroom teaches life and earth sciences

BY MARY PAT DALY

Students at Glencoe Elementary School will soon be getting their hands dirty during class time thanks to parent volunteer efforts, neighborhood involvement, and a \$5000 Community Watershed Stewardship grant from the City of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services (BES). By spring of 2002, these combined efforts will have resulted in a garden of native plants and natural landscapes once occupied by a patch of grass. "Parents and teachers are very excited about creating an outdoor classroom where students can have a hands-on environmental learning experience," says Marianne Zarkin, Glencoe parent, landscape architect and chair of the Outdoor Classroom Committee at Glencoe. The future native plants garden will be a demonstration site for nature-scaping, helping citizens, both young and old, learn about watershed issues and the positive impacts of landscaping for water quality and wildlife. "We also want the space to be a place for the children to be in and spend time in, a place for a class to congregate," says Zarkin.

The kick-off event for the

project happens on Sunday, October 29, when a free Naturescaping for Clean Rivers workshop will be held at Glencoe from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Developed by the Portland BES and East Multnomah Soil and Water District, the workshop is one facet of the city's stewardship education program described in the city's Clean River Plan. Adult and high school-age participants will learn how native plants, natural landscapes and water-friendly gardening practices can benefit their own gardens, as well as Portland's air and water quality. Advance registration is required. Call 503-797-1842 or you may send an email to naturescaping@yahoo.com.

In the upcoming school year, the 450 students at Glencoe will have the opportunity to learn and apply the same principles and techniques taught in the workshop. Environmental educators from Portland's BES will visit classrooms and provide instruction about the watershed. Working side-by-side with landscape architects, students will learn about garden design and plant selection. Classroom teachers will implement the Portland Public Schools Science Investigations curriculum. 5th Grade teacher, Bernice Rust



Glencoe students get ready to work on the native plants garden

plans to use the garden as an outdoor laboratory. "An outdoor classroom at Glencoe would provide us with an opportunity to make on-site observations and conduct experiments in life and earth sciences. Emphasis would be placed on environmentally safe

ways to protect our watershed by being responsible stewards of our natural area," says Rust.

Principal Judy Scott agrees. She describes the garden as a learning laboratory for developing scientific knowledge and concepts

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Community participates in naturescaping project

from cover

and teaching children the concepts of conservation and community service. "We welcome the Glencoe Outdoor Classroom as an avenue for the entire community to come together to support the teaching and learning process at Glencoe School."

If the initial show of community support for this project is any indicator, Mrs. Scott's invitation has already been well heard. Glencoe's neighbor to the north, Portland Nursery, has offered plant discounts and committed staff and volunteer time to assist with the design, installation and maintenance of the garden. Partial funding for the Naturescaping for Clean Rivers workshop was generously donated by Jan Caplener/Realty Trust, the Center-Neighborhood Association and the Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association. Both associations have also offered their public meetings and newsletters as a forum for sharing design plans and progress reports with the community. To further educate visitors, interpretive signs will be a garden feature. Design-

ers from GXI, Inc. will provide signage design, sign construction and installation assistance for the demonstration garden. Technical assistance in the areas of biology, horticulture and environmental planning will come from Parametrix, Inc.

Creating any garden requires a lot of planning. When planning a naturescaped garden, careful attention is paid to the time of year planting occurs. Fall planting makes use of Portland's winter rains, allowing the plants to become well established by summer, thus easing irrigation needs. The Outdoor Classroom's timeline incorporates these strategies. Planning and design will occur during the winter of 2001, followed by site construction. To guard against erosion and soil loss, cover crops and straw mulch will be used. Next fall, it will be time to till under the cover crops and begin planting the native plants.

Why are so many people excited about this project? What's the vision? Judy Scott is optimistic about the future of the garden.

She says, "We hope neighbors and community members will join our gardeners in producing joyful learning, conservation and the value of collaboration and enjoy the beauty of this garden for many years to come." That vision brings a few scenes to mind: bright-eyed children discovering the first ladybugs in the garden, strolling neighbors stopping to linger for a chat on the garden benches, more butterflies and birds sampling the nectar and berries in the garden, neighbors who begin replacing their own grass with native plants and news reports of improved water quality in the Willamette River.

Intrigued? Learn more by attending the workshop. The garden gate is still wide open for volunteers. "We'll need lots of help this spring during site construction," says Zarkin. Donations of time, materials or money are welcome throughout the project. If you'd like to be involved in the Outdoor Classroom at Glencoe, call Marianne Zarkin at 503-232-5163.