

Valley Living

Schools collaborated on Owen Middle School's grounds and gardens

STAFF REPORTS

Charles D. Owen Middle School students and staff have been developing the plants and paths on their 40-acre campus but were challenged to find the time and people to maintain them.

Their solution was to partner with students at Owen High School for a day of helping with the middle school's Natural Impact Initiative. The ongoing initiative has inspired the middle schoolers to create different types of gardens and add chestnut trees and milkweed plots. All that work has resulted in plants that need to be watered, transplanted or trimmed. Annual plants needed to be replaced, weeds needed to be picked and mulch needed to be added.

"Our first thought was to get after school clubs to help, as well as utilizing work days offered by local churches and colleges," said Brittany Krasutsky, who is heading up the initiative at Owen Middle School. "This worked well the first year, but as we added more cultivated areas, we needed to expand our plan. We wanted to involve more kids."

Krasutsky and Jim Cooper, both seventh-grade science teachers at the school, invited Owen High teachers Michael Beaver, Richard James, Pamela Rhoda and Kimberly Shankle to tour the middle school campus in hopes that a collaboration might result. From the meeting came the idea that Rhoda's environmental science class would be bussed to the middle school to put in a day of work.

"Our goal," Krasutsky said, "was to get the students out in nature, working in teams, practicing good stewardship and investing sweat equity into their environment. If we can connect OMS students with peer mentors at OHS and get them to collaborate together on projects

like beautification and environmental awareness, we might accomplish several good things."

One is that middle school students might transition to high school more easily and less stressfully because they know some people there, Krasutsky said. Other benefits would include learning to work as a team that contributes to its community.

"On Tuesday, May 3, they gave it a go," Krasutsky said. Working four shifts throughout the day, 125 seventh-grade students and 25 high school students weeded, transplanted, picked up trash, raked pebbles, dug post holes and did anything else that needed to be done to clean up the campus.

"It was hard work, and my arms were tired," said Sam Gray, a seventh-grader on the crew that dug post holes. "But it was quite nice to give back to a school that has given me a lot."

High school students Ryley Ogle and Garrett Cole said they enjoyed being outside of the classroom while working with younger students to help them make the middle school look better.

Seventh-grader Megan Ogle was able to team up with Ryley, her older brother. "It was great to get fresh air but even better to spend an extra part of my day with my brother doing something for my school."

"I had a great time just being outside and getting dirt on my jeans," student Sam Hey said. "Working on the pond is a beautiful project that you get to see immediate results."

Lots of sweat, coupled with lots of laughter, made for a fun day, Krasutsky said. "Students are proud of the work they did, and the halls are full of excited story-sharing about the day. With the overwhelming success of this event, Owen Middle School faculty feels we have found a wonderful solution to ensuring students are connected to and caring for their school environment."



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO BMN

Leif Ruit and other high school students dig post holes at a work day at Owen Middle School.

High schoolers help younger peers with GARDENS



Owen High and Owen Middle School students spent a recent day working on the middle school gardens and grounds.