

School Spotlight: Lake View Elementary uses outdoor classroom



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Two years ago, Lake View Elementary School parent Keith Warnke, who works for the Department of Natural Resources, told teacher Susie Hobart that he could help the school take advantage of its setting next to woods.

That conversation at the school's annual Back to School Night open house led to a whirlwind of activity that resulted in the

celebration of Lake View's outdoor classroom model, forest restoration, garden expansion and pavilion completion at this year's open house last Tuesday. The project is in the first year of a five-year plan.

"We're out here, we're up close to nature and we're still in the classroom," said third-grader Mason Walter, 8.

Before, teachers didn't have their students spend much time outside, Hobart said. When the school started composting lunch waste four years ago, a couple of garden beds were planted, but the operation was very low scale.

But over the last two years volunteers "came out of the woodwork," she said.

The first year, some study of the woods was incorporated into the curriculum, said Hobart, who was teaching fourth and fifth graders at the time. But outdoor education at Lake View really took off the following year after six staff members received training from Community GroundWorks, formerly Friends of Troy Gardens.

In the meantime, Hobart started writing grants, which in part allowed teachers to undergo training on outdoor education. Hobart, who has served as the project facilitator, is teaching environmental education this year through the grant and is a substitute teacher.

Students came up with the idea of the pavilion, and on Earth Day parent volunteers started building it through the help of Tom Hirsch, volunteer architect, and Tim Connor, volunteer contractor and parent of a Lake View student.

Art teacher Sebastian Vang worked with students who each created four tiles with environmental themes to decorate the posts and beams.

A group of talented and gifted students painted literacy-based murals on bench seats of

the four picnic tables in the pavilion.

Ulysses Kovach was a third grader last year when he came up with a name for the new structure. "We should call it the Pazillion, because we can do a 'pazillion' things in it," he said at the time.

Paths wind around in the woods, which are divided into six areas, including the Friendship Circle. The Oak Grove Music Garden will be an area where students can experiment with pots and pans and study sound.

"You will just be able to go to the garden and eat...You'll still be healthy," said fifth grader Nukari Sharpe, 10.

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