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St. Simons Elementary plants habitat garden

By LAUREN MCDONALD lmcdonald@goldenisles.news Sep 29, 2016



St. Simons Elementary School teacher Meggie McKinley gets some help watering plants from her sons William, age 6, middle, and Reid, 4, as they help plant a native coastal garden at the school along with other students, teachers, and volunteers.

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At St. Simons Elementary School — just steps from the beach — students never have to travel far to learn about coastal habitats.

And thanks to the work of the school's Parent Teacher Association and a few dedicated volunteers, that lesson will soon be even closer. In the coming months, students will learn about coastal plant life in a garden just outside their classroom windows.

Parents, teachers and other volunteers took part in a planting day on Tuesday to set up a new habitat garden in the school's courtyard area.



The project is funded through the school's PTA.

"We're hoping that this can be used as just another outdoor classroom to come to learn," said Courtney Roberts, co-president of the PTA. "We're so proud of the science that we're able to interweave with our curriculum here."

The school also operates an Ocean Lab, where students learn about coastal habitats and other science topics in an indoor lab and outdoor classroom. Roberts said she's expecting the habitat garden to complement the Ocean Lab.

On Tuesday, donated plants — all native to this region — were spread out around the garden, ready to be planted by volunteers.

"It's a planting frenzy right now," said Carol Denhof, the St. Simons Elementary parent who proposed the creation of the habitat garden.

Denhof, a plant ecologist, proposed to the PTA that the school take the existing mission garden, which had been unmaintained for several years, and convert it to a habitat garden.

“I had just been really impressed with the Ocean Lab,” she said. “The kids learned a lot about the animal life that lives in the ocean. And I was thinking how we could build on that, and thought it would be really neat to teach kids about the habitats that occur along the coast.”



The PTA collaborated with Coastal WildScapes to get the garden set up.

“In 2017, our theme as an organization is going to be Coastal Habitats, so we’re featuring many different habitat sites here, all the way from dunes to wetlands,” said Linda Lamb, one of Coastal WildScape’s founding members and a volunteer on Tuesday. “We hope the kids will get very involved and take ownership of this with us.”

Erin Greer, an art teacher at St. Simons Elementary, said her students use the garden to create scientific drawings of the plants.

“This is a space that has been needing some utilization,” Greer said.

Roberts said she looks forward to the education her daughter and all the students at St. Simons Elementary will receive through the habitat garden.

“Carol Denhof is one of our amazing parents, and we knew with her expertise we could bring this back to life,” she said.

Spotlight on Schools appears Thursdays. Contact Lauren McDonald at lmcdonald@thebrunswicknews.com or at 265-8320, ext. 322 to suggest a topic for a column.

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