



PLANNING FOR FUTURE

Fair provides information about post-secondary education PAGE A7



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HANDS-ON LEARNING

Prairie Point gets educational ecosystem

By Ray Weikal

Lifting rocks can be educational and fun.

Students at Prairie Point Elementary School helped build their own pond and outdoor classroom on a clear, cool Friday, Sept. 19.

Starting first thing in the morning, groups of five students randomly chosen from each class got to move hunks of South Dakota granite and plant lily pads, rushes, arrowheads and horsetails in a 2-foot hole prepared the day

before by volunteers from Wardrip Landscaping. By the end of the day, the 11-foot-by-16-foot pond — plus a water fall and 10-foot-long stream — was filled with water and stocked with goldfish and koi.

The project was made possible because Wardrip Landscaping donated labor, equipment and materials, according to Principal Jennifer Corum. Teachers will use the new outdoor classroom and curriculum provided by the

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MATT FRYE/Sun Gazette

Prairie Point Elementary School kindergartners Emma Hullinger, right, and Mackenzie Albright throw decorated rocks into the newly completed pond on the backside of the school Friday, Sept. 19. Wardrip Landscaping donated the materials and labor to construct the pond.



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the multimedia and interactive social

VOTE: Web sites draw young voters

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across Park Hill School District will participate in Kids Vote. Just like adult voters, the young people will go to polling places in each building, sign in at tables staffed by volunteers, wait in line and cast secret votes using computers, according to Communications Director Nicole Kirby. The event is being organized with help from the YMCA of Greater Kansas City.

"It's important that

streams.

Election turnout by young voters has steadily risen since the late 1990s. In Missouri, the number of voters ages 18 to 29 increased by 125 percent during the 2004 general election compared to four years earlier, according to Rock the Vote.

Staff writer Ray Weikal can be reached at 389-6637 or rayweikal@npgco.com.

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POND: Idea developed six months ago

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national non-profit educational organization "Ponds for Kids," Corum explained. "This pond actually aligns our school with state curriculum standards, including ecosystem changes, interactions with living organisms and understanding the scientific process," she said.

The pond was installed in a notch on the building's west side, called "Ian's Garden Courtyard." The space is dedicated to Ian Moise, a student at the school who died in 2003. Ian Moise's brother, Ryan, is a fifth-grader at Prairie Point Elementary and helped with the pond project.

"I think it's a great idea because it will help learning and science," Ryan Moise said. "We've really never had anything like this before."

The idea for the pond was sparked about six months ago, according to Wardrip Landscaping's Penny Thompson. One of her co-workers — Matt Bolger — has a daughter at the school and wife who teaches there. Company owners and employees knew about "Ponds for Kids" and decided to bring the program to Prairie Point Elementary School.

"We just really enjoyed the community service and wanted something that

would be long lasting," Thompson said.

Craig Gurgens is a landscape designer with Wardrip Landscaping. The pond will evolve its own ecosystem over time, he said, which adds to its educational value.

"You'll get insects and amphibians naturally over time," Gurgens said.

The pond was also designed to be low maintenance and Earth friendly, Gurgens explained.

"Bacteria will colonize those rocks and help purify the water," he said. "The biology of it is what keeps it clean."

With labor and materi-

als, the entire pond project was worth "several thousand dollars," Gurgens estimated. Some of the plants were donated by Grass Pad, a nursery on Barry Road.

Moise took a breather while Wardrip Landscaping employees and his classmates struggled with the hundreds of rocks, some weighing as much as 150 pounds.

"This part's probably the hardest working we'll be all day, with all these big rocks," Moise said, and smiled and went back to work.

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