

CummingPatch

Sharon Elementary Opens Outdoor Learning Area

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May 15, 2012

[Sharon Elementary School](#) in south Forsyth County hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony on Tuesday for the grand opening of its outdoor learning area called DIGS (Discover, Inspire, Grow, Succeed). The Sharon DIGS is a state of the art educational area which in unlike any other in Georgia.

The DIGS is a 15,000 square foot area hosting more than 50,000 pounds of boulders rocks, and stones, donated from Mountain Stone, Lafarge Aggregates, and Polycor for the study of native geology. There is enough dirt and plants, thanks to John Deere Landscapes, for the students to maintain their own vegetable and herb gardens in raised and ground level beds.



A WeatherBug Weather Station, complete with a digital system communicating with Sharon's new science lab, along with a rain gauge, anemometer, windsock, and sundial, will reside in the DIGS to help the children become familiar with regional weather patterns.

A large, wooden shed built with reclaimed barn wood and tin roofing donated by the Forsyth County Parks and Recreation Department, will be the cornerstone of the DIGS. The shed will provide a viewing area for various antiques, Georgian farming implements gleaned from the Historical Society of Forsyth County.

"We are proud of what you've done at Sharon Elementary to encourage children to learn outside of the classroom by building a nature trail, outdoor classroom, and the DIGS area," said Martha McConnell, Co-President of the Historical Society.

A working hand pump will reside right next to the shed to enable children to pump water.

There's also a huge stone amphitheater, stained concrete sidewalk stamped with nature prints, and a butterfly garden offering some of the other points of interest in the DIGS that will provide an inspiration for various educational activities such as poetry, writing, and fine arts. Outdoor musical instruments will be added to further accomplish the curriculum in a multidisciplinary manner.





The DIGS has been specifically designed to integrate outdoor learning with classroom curriculum. Through hands-on, inquiry-based learning that encourages participants to ask questions, gather information, and investigate possibilities, the DIGS promotes experiential learning opportunities in an authentic setting. The DIGS inspires students to think, reflect, question, and engage in the highest levels of learning.

"The DIGS is an innovative way to bring informal science experiences, formerly preserved for museums and nature centers, to

our backyard, said Dr. Kelly Price, science program leader of Forsyth County Schools. "The DIGS will serve as a potential learning resource for all students in Forsyth County."

The project, valued at more than \$100,000, was a collaborative effort between parents, administrators, volunteers, and local businesses, particularly GINGKO Lawn & Landscapes. It was funded by grants and private donations. The DIGS will compliment learning in the new Sharon Science Lab, which opened last fall.

Sharon Elementary School, a platinum award winner, serves nearly 1,000 students in Forsyth County. More information can be found on the [Sharon Elementary Web site](#).