

Learning center set for school grounds

Outdoor DIGS coming to Sharon

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States Wing and Amy Bartlett

Students from every grade gathered outside Sharon Elementary to check out their new digs.

What was just a grassy field Thursday will by mid-May have turned it into the DIGS, an outdoor learning center for students.

"In the next four months, you will see this whole area transform into a brand new area of learning," Principal Amy Bartlett told students at the ground-breaking ceremony.

"There's going to be a farm area where we can grow things. There will be a butterfly garden. There will be creek beds, bridges, an amphitheater.

"We're going to have a weather station out here, and you're all going to be able to watch it happen."

Armed with golden shovels, students including Lucia Morris and Sam Barich dug chunks of dirt for the groundbreaking.

The two girls were the catalysts for the DIGS, which is short for Discover, Inspire, Grow and Succeed. They proposed to Bartlett that students have a garden in the yard.

"We just thought of a little 6-by-4-foot wallflower garden with a little plaque that says property of the Sharon Elementary School Garden Club," Morris said. "We never really thought it would go this far.

"If you want to have something done in your school, you can do it. All you have to do is present the idea."

After school officials decided to go ahead with the project, Bartlett enlisted the help of a parent.

States Wing, a local landscape architect, had once offered to help if the school ever needed some outdoor work done. But he never thought he'd be asked to tackle a project of this magnitude.

Presented with the community garden idea, he decided to go big.

"I wanted to see it done right and I wanted to see it done long term. I don't want to see any corners cut," he said. "I want to see this be right here in 20 or 30 years when Ms. Bartlett and I aren't here and our children aren't here.

"I want the community to have a courtyard that they're really proud of and I want it to be a legacy for the teachers and the kids."

Bartlett said the project will allow students to create and maintain their own garden and learn about native plants of Geor-

The plan also includes space for a dial, rain gauge, antique farm equipment and a tree stump for dents to count rings.

"We're going to strategically place items out there that correlate with standards in every grade level," said. "Our goal is to eventually develop outdoor labs.

"We said why not make this an that's not just beautiful but also an tive learning environment."



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When completed, the outdoor learning center will have room for up to three classes to have outdoor lessons.

Barich said they've learned a few things just preparing for the ground breaking.

"We made calls to companies asking them to donate plants or equipment," she said.

The groundbreaking was worth the work, Morris said.

"It was really, really fun to see everyone out there," she said. "The entire school watching us break ground was like payback for all the work we've done."

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