

News-Review

Vanderbilt students plant hardwoods as part of 'Tree Campus' Initiative

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VANDERBILT — All 97 students of Vanderbilt Area School are helping make their campus a greener place by planting and caring for 13 native hardwood trees on the school grounds.

Led by conservation nonprofit Huron Pines, students in kindergarten through 12th grade planted an assortment of maple, oak and redbud trees around the school Oct 14. Each grade level adopted their own class tree which they will care for as it matures. Once fully grown, the trees will provide shade for the school building and for students wanting a comfortable place to gather or read outside.

This project is part of Arbor Day Foundation's Tree Campus K-12 program, facilitated through Huron Pines, which aims to show students the benefits of trees through classroom and outdoor learning. It is the latest collaboration in a long standing partnership with Huron Pines, which has included the development and stewardship of its school forest as a place for students to connect to their natural environment and greater Vanderbilt community.

"The way in which students stepped right up to do the work was really impressive," Abby Ertel, community program director for Huron Pines, said about the tree-planting day. "Some of the older students dug holes and helped the younger kids plant and fence trees, so there was some mentorship and peer learning which was great to see. It was the kind of day that makes you smile."

Zachary Schomp teaches science for grades 7 to 12. He uses the tree planting day and school forest trail as opportunities to teach his biology students about tree identification and how trees are adapted to different soil conditions and environments. He said students were particularly excited about connecting with their own class tree.

"They know which tree is theirs and they feel responsible for it," Schomp said. "It's really something, especially for the younger kids who like the idea of growing up with their tree."

Otsego Community Foundation supported the purchase of the landscaping trees and protective fencing material. Other supporters include Consumers Energy Foundation Planet Award, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.