

## Coventry

# Students get hands dirty in Garden Club

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COVENTRY — Middle schoolers are making strides in spreading the word and getting more people involved in a garden project for an outdoor classroom at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School.

Master Gardener and parent volunteer, Jim Paiva, along with Elizabeth Collie, a teacher at the school, made their presentation during Thursday's PTSA meeting.

Collie said she once had a "little idea" of having a garden in the courtyard in the middle of the school. She explained that last year the school entered a contest to try to win funding for an outdoor classroom. Although the school did not win, the application was noticed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who selected the school to participate in a school yard habitat program.

"It's really been growing and what we really need to do is form a committee to help grow the program," Collie said. "Some of our goals are for the kids to get exposure to gardening, nature, science and exposure to healthier foods and eating

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# Garden

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habits,” Paiva said. “It also helps with socialization and getting outdoors and being part of an environment and having fun.”

The existing vegetable beds produced over 200 pound of food in 2016, and there are several other Eagle projects also connected to the garden.

Paiva explained that one pine tree that was adding very little value and hindering vegetable growth, was cut down but created garden beds, a table and vegetable supporters.

“We also have swails, which are paths dug into the ground to form a deep trail where rain can be collected,” he said, “which would cause flooding issues elsewhere in the garden and keeps the water where the plants can use it.”

He said many of the things they’ve done have been from environmental ingenuity that cost nothing.

“The drainage was terrible, the water would back up,” Collie added.

The support that is needed by far, is parental support to serve on the garden committee.

The needed labor requires two Saturday work days for the spring and fall and maintenance during the summer.

“In addition to the habitat

design and creation, we are working with our partners at Audubon to create resources and provide professional development training for teachers so that the most can be made of the habitat,” Paiva added.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Representative Cindy Corsair said the focus has shifted to get the habitat programs off the ground, which are going strong in Connecticut.

“We have one official habitat complete so far, in Providence, with was a pilot program and now we’re ready to get more off the ground,” she said. “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Schoolyard Program to connect people to nature by restoring wildlife habitat and creating learning spaces on school grounds where students can observe, draw, write, think and question, while also providing quality habitat for local wildlife.”

Corsair knows Providence isn’t the same as Coventry, however the need for kids to get outside and away from the electronic devices is still just as important.

Every project is different, based on schools’ needs but all are designed to initiate involvement in forming a team, to create a design project, develop a master plan and assess the project site and to incorpo-

rate plans for maintenance and use of the project.

“It helps teachers use their schoolyard habitats and not add to the work they already have and it provides lessons that align with national and state standards,” she said.

Corsair said the last step is telling your story, which will involve a ribbon-cutting ceremony and in some cases, the children can display the work they’ve created with the garden as their inspiration.

Lauren Parmelee, of the Audubon Society, commented on the great start the school has done already with the space.

The team would consist of core members, students and anyone who is interested with being connected with the project as people are needed for tasks as they are available.

Phase one is where the Fish and Wildlife assists with the largest funding chunk of \$2,000 then

“We haven’t given the money yet, we just need to get a team together before we write a check,” Corsair said. “Usually it’s a core team of four who can commit then others interested and we’re hoping to know that information by the end of this month.”

If anyone is interested in learning more and how they can get involved, they are invited to call the school at 822-9426.