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Wednesday, November 7, 2012

News

Students give back to area nonprofits

WOW Student Generosity Project ramps up efforts

By **KATHERINE WUTZ**
Express Staff Writer

Kids throughout the Wood River Valley are making plans to install recycling bins in Hailey, build a garden that will bring more bees to the valley and provide care packages for kids in domestic abuse shelters—all due to the efforts of area schools and the Wood River Foundation.



Students from Toni Coleman's sixth-grade class at the Community School in Sun Valley help prepare a "pollinator garden" at the Sawtooth Botanical Garden south of Ketchum. The garden is meant to bring bees and other pollinators to the garden, and is only one of a myriad of projects that local students are carrying out through the WOW Student Generosity Project. Courtesy photo

Area schools have partnered with the foundation to form the WOW Student Generosity Project, a program that foundation President Morley Golden says combines monetary philanthropy with community service.

"Every time you turn around, you see something that was created due to the generosity of the people of the

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community," he said. "Time, talent and treasure are the fabric that binds the community together."

Wood River Valley students in kindergarten through 12th grade got their first taste of the project earlier this school year, when they were told that they would receive \$25 to donate to a local nonprofit of their choice.

Teachers then chose a nonprofit project for the students to donate their time and money to. Many were specifically developed for local students. Golden said the idea is to give kids something tangible to which they can attach their generosity—such as rain shelters for the Animal Shelter of the Wood River Valley's dogs or the Sawtooth Botanical Garden's Pollinator Garden.

"Whether we volunteer our time or invest our money, we want to feel that we have contributed to an outcome," Golden said.

Molly Goodyear, executive director of the Environmental Resource Center, said the children who are interested in the center's projects are incredibly enthusiastic. The ERC is working with the first-graders at Hemingway Elementary in Ketchum and the We Appreciate the Earth's Resources (W.A.T.E.R.) club at Wood River High School to fund putting recycling bins on the streets in Hailey.

Goodyear said the project is a chance for high school students to teach the younger students about the importance of recycling, while being able to produce something tangible for the community. She said her students will go before the Hailey City Council next month to gain approval for the project.



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Gabe Rogel,
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"It's a really fantastic idea that benefits not only the students in the valley, but our whole valley," she said. "It shows everyone how philanthropy works, and how giving back to your community can be a really positive thing."

Tricia Swartling, executive director of the Advocates for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, said the sixth-grade class at the Community School is working on the Pajama Project, which would provide welcome packages for children who have to stay at the Advocates' shelter.

"The class will brainstorm what they think would help kids who come to the shelter feel more comfortable and safe,"

she said.

Items could include pajamas, stuffed animals, toothbrushes or pillowcases decorated with encouraging messages, Swartling said. The money donated by students can pay for the packages and for the cost of a child spending the night in the shelter.

Swartling said the Advocates helped 102 kids in fiscal 2012, some of whom were at the shelter and some of whom received counseling and education through the school. Swartling said that while children can usually take personal items to the shelter, they do not always have the opportunity.

"Sometimes people who are in violent relationships have to leave right away, and they have to leave a lot of their stuff," she said. "And it's not their home, it's our shelter. It's a strange environment. If they walked in the door and someone said, 'Here's a welcome package,' it takes some of the scare out of it, I think."

Golden said 20 percent of the valley's students are participating. The goal for this year is to get 25 percent, and Golden said that within a few years, he hopes to include all the valley's 4,000 students.

"Every day, we have one or two more classrooms on board," he said.

For more information, visit www.wow-students.org.

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