

Students receive donations for school vegetable garden project]

EcoTeam at James Grieve Public School excited to start their own gardens

By Zachary Roman

Donations from Caledon gardeners and community members are going to help the next generation of green-thumbed residents begin their journeys.

On April 5, students and teachers from the 'EcoTeam' at James Grieve Public School received donations gathered by the Albion Hills Community Farm (AHCF) and Palgrave United Community Kitchen (PUCK).

Donations included gardening books and equipment, reusable produce bags, and a gift basket from Glen Echo Nurseries.

The donations were received at the 'Seedy Saturday' event held on February 25 by AHCF and PUCK in support of the Caledon public school vegetable garden project. Caledon's Peel District School Board trustee, Stan Cameron, is leading a program to install vegetable gardens in all of Caledon's public schools this year.

Seedy Saturday was held for the first time in Caledon this year, and brought together beginner and experienced gardeners for a day of fun and education. There was a wide variety of seeds available, a potting station, numerous vendor and community tables, and presentations at the event.

Jennifer Goodhand is a teacher at James Grieve Public School and has been involved with the EcoTeam there for seven years. She's led students in initiatives like promoting litterless lunches, but the garden project at the school is a first for her.

'We are starting with planting a small 10 by five pollinator garden this year, and right next to it will be the vegetable garden,' said Goodhand. 'We're going to do both gardens at the same time; the long-term plan is to build on them and expand them' but also turn (the area) into an outdoor learning (area).'

Goodhand said between 30 and 45 students between Grades 1 and 8 at James Grieve Public School are involved with the EcoTeam, as well as four teachers. EcoTeam students, as well as Grade 3 students learning about plants and soil, are going to go outside and help plant the school's two gardens soon.

'We'll be planting the pollinator seedlings first by the end of April or early May, and then vegetable seedlings in early June,' said Goodhand. 'The staff of MDR Design + Build, a Caledon contracting company, are donating their labour to help us prepare the ground for our gardens. Local farmer Owen Goltz is loaning equipment for that purpose.'

Goodhand has always been passionate about environmental issues, but is new to the world of gardening. She said she has a bit of environmental anxiety and that it's good to take action where you can. With students losing out on extracurriculars during the pandemic, Goodhand said she and her students are excited to go full force into the new garden project.

'I'm just trying to keep busy doing things that might be helpful,' said Goodhand.

Karen Hutchinson of the AHCF was on hand on April 5 to help present donations to the students. She said gardening is a great lesson for students as it teaches them their hard work will pay off. Gardening is experiential learning, said Hutchinson, and added it's very important for students to learn where their food comes from.

Hutchinson has done many gardening workshops and said when people learn about something, they care about it more.

Naturally, she's a big fan of the school vegetable garden project.

?There's the environmental piece, the food piece, there's the science piece? getting outside,? said Hutchinson. ?Food connects us all.?

Hutchinson said while the vegetable garden project will be challenging, everyone is excited and ready to take it on.