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Brooke Wolsey and Emma Goaling assist with the landscape makeover

photo by Chris Fritchie

Benefiting a Larger Family

By Wendy Crooks

THINGS LOOKED REALLY GOOD on the inside of Glen Oaks Elementary. In fact, this year, the McKinney school was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon school. From all accounts, the teachers and students, with support from their parents, were working hard and excelling on the inside. The outside, on the other hand, needed a lot of work and left a lot to be desired. Principal Beth Parker had long desired a nicer look for her school and she made her desires known. It didn't take long for those desires to be heard by the right people.

At about the same time Ms. Parker was letting her wishes for a landscaping makeover be known, Paul Gosling came into the picture. Mr. Gosling works with Girl Scout Service Unit 184 in the area of community relations. His goal was to increase visibility for the McKinney area Girl Scouts. With that in mind, he started going from school to school meeting with the principals to find out

what their needs were. He began his efforts close to home at his daughter's school, Glen Oaks.

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After realizing the need for a new landscaping plan, Mr. Gosling knew exactly who to contact. Aaron Wolsey from Majestic Gardens, who also has a daughter at Glen Oaks and is a member of the Brownie Girl Scout Troop 416 with Mr. Gosling's daughter. Mr. Wolsey agreed to re-design the school

landscaping with the goals of providing more aesthetically pleasing landscaping as well as cut down on the maintenance and upkeep. After talking with Mr. Wolsey, the project gained momentum.

One of the biggest challenges was working with the different organizations to make it all come together. "For example," said Mr. Gosling, "we had to make sure that what Majestic Gardens had in mind was acceptable to the school and the school district." One of the most exciting aspects of the project was that Mr. Wolsey was able to get all of the materials they would need donated. Initially he had one company lined up to donate everything but that deal fell through. Mr. Wolsey quickly got to work calling different vendors that he had worked with in the past to see what they might be able to donate. With some additional work and planning, he was able to get everything for the project donated from several different companies.



Brownies and their families work together



photo by Chris Fritchie

Contractors Stone, JBS, Western Plains, Preston Trial Stone, Southwest Wholesale and Home Depot Landscape generously donated everything from sand, rocks and mulch to flowers, shrubs and even Texas geodes, decorative crystallized rocks.

After the plans were made and approved, and the donations were secured, it was time to roll up their sleeves and do the physical work. "Since so many people complained about the landscaping, surely getting volunteers to work on the project wouldn't be a problem," thought Mr. Wolsey. What he didn't count on was the unpredictable Texas weather surprising them with the first torrential downpour of the year on the very weekend the landscape transformation was to occur. That, coupled with it being a holiday weekend, made their volunteers scarce.

Not to be discouraged by the lack of participation, Mr. Wolsey and Mr. Gosling got to work digging up the

plants and shrubs that weren't needed and began preparing the beds for the new additions. That's when they came upon their next big challenge. "Digging up the old bushes was very difficult because they were so established. They had been there for years," said Mr. Gosling.

What he didn't count on was the unpredictable weather surprising them with the first torrential downpour of the year on that weekend.

On the following weekend, along with their handful of volunteers and the Brownie Girl Scouts that came to help, the project really began to take form.

The Brownies were very committed. "It was pouring down rain. The girls were soaked and cold but they didn't stop smiling," said Mr. Gosling. "This was really a great lesson because one of the Girls Scout's goals is to commit to something and see it through to the end."

Now that the project is complete, the first grade girls are bonded by the pride they feel for their hard work and the work of their parents. McKenna Devlin, who just became a Brownie, said, "I have lots of friends in Brownies and my Dad worked really hard. He also had to keep an eye on my little sister!" Emma Gosling said, "It was crazy when we were working in the rain. It was hard to pull up the weeds too, but it was cool." Michaela White said, "It was hard work but I loved it when we got to plant things and when we dug up things. I also get to tell my other friends at school that we did it." Brooke Wolsey said, "It was really hard digging up the old plants and

I liked planting the flowers the best.” Brooke added, “I feel proud because when I walk up, I see something totally different.”

Mr. Wolsey says that they are now working on a bridge to add to the landscaping. It will cross a dry river bed and symbolize the educational journey that the children who attend Glen Oaks Elementary take beginning in kindergarten through their fifth grade year.

Overall, the project seemed to be a win-win for everyone concerned. “Ms. Parker has been very supportive of the Girl Scouts over the years, allowing us to use the school for meetings and our Twilight Camp over the summer,” said Mr. Wolsey. “This is our way of saying thanks.” The school’s principal mirrored those sentiments by saying, “They are a great group and they like to do whatever they can to help out.” Ms. Parker also added that it was really nice to see the parents and the children working together on the project. “Anytime we have a chance to connect with a group and their parents, it makes us a stronger school and we strive for that.”

The project has certainly made the school look nicer but it doesn’t seem to stop there. Ms. Parker said that all of the students have learned a lot as a result of the project. “During our morning announcements, we were able to point out to the whole school what an awesome example of kindness and respect for property that these girls and their families demonstrated in the project.” The students have even had a lesson in horticulture as well. “We’ve been able to talk to them about the native plants that were used and how they grow naturally in our environment.”

“At our school we talk a lot about being proud and respectful” said Ms. Parker “And the project really fit into what we believe here at Glen Oaks.” The school’s motto, “In everything you do and say, be safe, kind and respectful – it’s the Glen Oaks way!” was definitely reflected in this great community project.

Wendy Crooks is a freelance writer living in Plano.



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