

Flint Currents

Flint Currents is a publication of Discovering PLACE (Place-based Learning and Community Experiences), a regional hub of the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative facilitated by the University of Michigan-Flint

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Students, community connect at 'Students Growing Roots' event

After intense planning by Discovering PLACE staff and school educators, the first community exchange, dubbed "Students Growing Roots," proved true to its name.

The event, held May 9, 2011 at downtown Flint's Riverfront Banquet Center, drew more than 100 Flint-area students, as well as family members and school staff members. The gathering was intended to encourage teachers and students to exchange success stories about their projects.

"But what also became apparent was the supportive community culture that has been created through these projects," said Danielle Gartner, Discovering PLACE coordinator.



McMonagle Elementary students in Dawn Knapp's second-grade class present tips for healthy living.

Students both presented their own class projects and attended presentations by other classes. Highlights included:

- Dawn Knapp's second-grade McMonagle class outlined healthy tips, including guidelines for exercising and smart meal choices.
- Tucker Elementary kindergartners from Shelly Roberts' class acted out "The Carrot Seed" story by Ruth Krauss, dramatizing how the seed was watered and weeded until a carrot grew. Between acting out the play and their own garden experiences, students have now memorized a sequence of gardening steps.
- McMonagle Elementary teachers Tomika Kelly and Sandie Wenger worked with second-graders to create cookbooks and share recipes featuring produce varieties being grown in the school's hydroponic garden.
- Beecher High School students in Dr. Don Hammond's class inspired their younger counterparts with a big-screen presentation on the school's recently opened nature trail.

Children were enchanted with the location and formal tablecloths for the meal setting, said Roberts,



Beecher High School junior Tyiesha Love explains her school's project to elementary students during the May 9 Discovering PLACE community exchange event at downtown Flint's Riverfront Banquet Center.

while the bus trip turned into an opportunity to point out local features, such as the Flint River.

High school students also toured the UM-Flint campus and were invited to hear environmental journalist Bill McKibben at a university-sponsored Critical Issues Forum luncheon, while elementary students were treated to a drawing lesson by Michigan illustrator Wendy Halperin (drawingchildrenintoreading.com).

Of the guests attending the Annual Gathering of the Flint River Corridor Alliance – who came out to hear McKibben – more than 30 stayed to learn more about the school projects and offer support. "We were once in your shoes," they told students.

"What was really exciting," said Gartner, "was seeing students connecting with their communities, teachers encouraging each other and parents coming out to support the work."

A big thank-you to everyone who helped with this year's community exchange! Teachers, please remember to complete the survey e-mailed to you. Your feedback will help make next year's event even better.



Students in Shelly Robert's kindergarten class at Tucker Elementary act out "The Carrot Seed" story by Ruth Krauss.

Summertime tips to help your project thrive

The countdown to summer has begun! But what happens to those lovely garden projects during teacher downtime? No doubt educators have already factored the less-active summer months into garden projects, but the following tips may prove handy, now that summer's just around the corner.

Low-maintenance garden tricks

Unfortunately, there's no such thing as remote-control veggie gardening: gardens require hands-on contact. But there are a few tricks that can reduce the time – and gas – spent visiting your garden.

Plant choices. First, choose plant varieties that are disease resistant, says Carol McTaggart, coordinator of the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program.

"Certainly some are more disease resistant than others," McTaggart said. Choosing easy-care varieties can make the difference between thriving plants and a wiped-out garden or a battle with bugs.

Mulch. Along with choosing the right plants, it's important to put a breathable barrier between the ground and the atmosphere. "Mulch, mulch, mulch," said McTaggart. Using a natural mulch, such as untreated wood chips, suppresses the growth of weeds, keeps moisture from evaporating too quickly and helps soil stay cooler. "Start

with good soil and healthy plants, and mulch and water regularly," said McTaggart, who doesn't recommend materials such as stone or recycled rubber. While straw can be used, it blows away more easily than wood chips.

Irrigation. Unless your garden has been flooded with rain, ensure it regularly gets a good soaking. To help water the garden while you're away, clean 2-liter bottles can be used as a makeshift irrigation system. Punch a hole in the cap with a nail, screw the cap back on and use kitchen scissors to cut off the base of the bottle. Bury the top of the bottle as near as possible to the plant you want to irrigate—it should be deep enough to remain upright on its own. Then fill with water before leaving the garden. Find more details at http://www.ehow.co.uk/how_5530979_use-water-outdoor-plants-vacation.html.

Recruiting help

The above tips can extend the time between garden work sessions but won't substitute for hands-on help. Here are some resources to find volunteers.

Summer school. Ideally, students will be involved in the garden. If your school is holding summer sessions, investigate working with summer school teachers to ensure the garden is cared for.

Summer garden club. Would students, parents or family members be willing to sign up to work in the garden on specific dates, in

exchange for a share of the produce?

Senior centers. Check with your local senior center director to see if members may be willing to volunteer working in the garden, perhaps in exchange for some fresh produce they harvest there.

To make it easier for volunteers – and possibly prevent young plants from being weeded out – plants should be labeled, recommends McTaggart. Consider making plant labels by laminating or covering a seed packet with waterproof packing tape, then using the tape to attach it to a popsicle stick or plastic knife. You may wish to make a laminated chart of your garden, with pictures of the plants that will be growing there, and store it with your gardening supplies.

Expert advice

Remember, your community partners are a great source of gardening wisdom, so ask for their advice if you need answers.

The Michigan State University Extension office can also offer expert tips.

Contact: Carol Groat, Master Gardener at (810) 695-0881, or Carol McTaggart, MSU Extension Master Gardener program coordinator, at (810) 244-8531 or carolmct@msu.edu.



Cookbooks build connections

While Michigan was knee-deep in snow this spring, McMonagle Elementary second-graders plucked tomatoes and sweet peppers from their hydroponics garden. Then they created a cookbook as a useful keepsake.

McMonagle teacher Tomika Kelly credits fellow teacher Sandie Wenger for the cookbook idea, an extension of the healthy

dishes students have written about in their journals this year.

"Each student picked their favorite recipe," said Kelly, "and created a picture to go along with it."

Place-based education – the focus of Discovering PLACE projects – applies curriculum to students' everyday lives. Since second-grade curriculum includes

measurement, lessons became more relevant when children learned about cups and quarts in garden-inspired recipes the class had been reading about, such as fruit yogurt, applesauce, or a breakfast dish of potatoes, bell peppers, onions and tomatoes.



Sandie Wenger's second-graders at Westwood Heights' McMonagle Elementary chose their own art to decorate the covers of their cookbooks.

"They see they can grow this and cook it too," said Kelly. "We're trying to put a real-life application in place so they can use the information and transfer it into their own lives."

Along with reading, writing, art, measurement, and smart food choices, students practiced following step-by-step directions and learned why a creative, appealing writing style is important. Children also learned something about publishing and first editions, said Wenger, and became familiar with how books are organized while writing title and copyright pages, along with a table of contents.

The cookbooks were presented at the May 9 community exchange event, "Students Growing Roots," and will be displayed again in a class gallery walk for parents, said Kelly. Then students will take home their cookbooks to use in their own kitchens.

"Students learned a tremendous amount throughout their gardening project," said Wenger, "and had a great deal of fun in the process."

Community Corner

For each edition of Flint Currents, Discovering PLACE features one of our community partners.

'Look for things that help you grow'

When work begins this month on the Tucker Elementary courtyard garden beds in the Beecher district, Carol and Dave Groat will be leading the way. The courtyard garden will become home to both flowers and vegetables. But it won't be students' first exposure to raising plants.

For the past two years, the Groats have been helping teacher Shelly Roberts with her Tucker grow lab, where students raise plants year 'round. In Roberts' kindergarten class, children grew herbs to take home for Christmas, and planted cuttings donated by Davison Greenhouse to grow houseplants for Mother's Day.

The Groats, who co-chair the Grow Lab division of the Genesee County Master Gardener Program, oversee 26 grow labs in 18 Flint-area elementary schools. Last year, Carol and Dave together logged 1,200 volunteer hours.

"If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it," said Carol, who says it gives her a chance to use her degree in education. Carol has worked with schools the past eight years; she

brought Dave on board after he retired from General Motors. Dave, who grew up on a farm and has an engineering degree, often takes care of mechanical issues with the grow labs.

Carol teaches four to five lessons in each classroom every year, based on curriculum requirements. That might range from teaching about desert or rainforest plants for classes studying land forms, to teaching which plants American settlers brought with them, to planting peanuts while learning about George Washington Carver.

Although Carol grew up a "city girl" without gardening experience, she took classes to become a Master Gardener through the Michigan State University Extension program. In the grow labs, Master Gardeners rely heavily on the help of other volunteers, known as "shepherds," who check plants between visits. Roberts, a Master Gardener who acts as a shepherd for the grow lab in her class, started working with the Groats while teaching at Dailey Elementary.

Because children are fascinated with grow labs and motivated to take care of their own plants, Carol said she rarely encounters discipline problems. When students run into her outside of school, they excitedly point her out as the "plant lady," she said.

The plant lessons apply not only to curriculum, but to students' lives. Similar to a seedling growing toward the light, Carol tells young students, "Look for things that help you grow, eat right, get outside, keep your mind healthy, work hard. You're all very capable of being successful."



Carol Groat checks the soil of plants grown in Shelly Roberts' kindergarten class at Beecher's Tucker Elementary.

Teacher Feature

For each edition of *Flint Currents*, *Discovering PLACE* features one of our member teachers.

Childhood Victory Garden inspires McMonagle teacher



For the past 17 years – nearly half of her career – Sandy Carey has worked with students in the Westwood Heights school district as a speech and language therapist.

Born and raised in Illinois, Carey

lived in northern Wisconsin before moving to Michigan when her husband was transferred to Lansing. She returned to work after her three children were born.

The McMonagle Elementary speech teacher was instrumental in bringing a hydroponics

garden to the school. Getting youth involved in gardening stems from an early childhood memory of working alongside her mother and grandparents in her family's Victory Garden.

During World War II, citizens were encouraged to raise their own food in Victory Gardens, so commercially-grown produce could be canned and shipped to the troops. Because her family's yard was small, the family obtained extra gas ration stamps to drive to a section of farmland where they grew vegetables, enough to load up their dirt-floor cellar with jars of tomatoes and green beans.

"Grandma, Grandpa, all of us worked on it," said Carey, whose father and uncles were veterans. "It was very much a place-based kind of a venture."

After working in education, Carey realized "children don't have much of a connection to the outside at all, much less a place to safely be doing some gardening."

Thanks to the hydroponics garden – where

plants are grown in water – elementary students practice academic skills while charting pH and nutrient levels. Youth fill the garden reservoir with water, pick peppers and tomatoes and learn that food origins don't have to be a mystery. "I think they're proud they can grow their own food," Carey said.

Bringing hope to students is especially important in a community where Carey knows students who were victims of shootings.

Along with working on students' speech and language skills, she spends her days encouraging youth to help others, hoping they "find some success in something they like to do at school, something that can overshadow the darkness in their lives," Carey said.

Carey's upbeat nature and sense of humor give children a reason to smile.

"I try to give kids cheerfulness and hope," Carey said. "I think the garden does that too."

Flint youth leader instrumental to Beecher video

When Jordan Munerlyn got a call from *Discovering PLACE* staff about creating music for the Beecher trail project video, he was "automatically, definitely on board."

"I love working with kids," said Munerlyn, 27, a lifelong Flint resident who has been working to help Flint youth.

The Flint musician contributed the soundtrack for the recently completed "Believing in Flint Youth" video. The 5-minute video heralds the completion of the nature trail-classroom at Beecher High School built by Dr. Don Hammond, a Beecher science teacher, and his students. The project was the first *Discovering PLACE* project to reach completion (see the video at <http://blogs.umflint.edu/glsi>).

Munerlyn was 16 when he taught himself to play keyboard on an instrument he paid for by working as a camp leader for Bridges to the Future. Today, he has a music production company, Breach House (<http://thebreachhouse.com>), where he

and musician-songwriter Aleah Moses are building a reputation for creating music for Web sites, video blogs and commercials.

Music generally takes a back seat to Munerlyn's work as a program coordinator for the Urban League of Flint, where he



Jordan Munerlyn and Aleah Moses of Breach House, creators of the music for the recent Beecher trail video.



See the Beecher trail video at blogs.umflint.edu/glsi

recently established a youth basketball association. Munerlyn also serves as a volunteer youth leader for Young Life, a nonprofit faith-based organization. After earning an associate degree in marketing, he is also enrolling at the University of Michigan-Flint with an eye toward majoring in sociology or social work.

"I'm big on community," said Munerlyn. "Sometimes it's easy to get weary, but it takes a village to raise a child."

Upcoming Event

Date/Time

Location

Audience

2011 Summer Institute

August 17 and 18, 2011

To be announced

Teachers, Community Partners

TOOLS FOR EXPLORING NATURE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

A
magnifying glass
helps you get a close-up
look at *nature!*

I'm
happy to
help!



Good outdoor explorers
always think ...
SAFETY FIRST!

Once you know some of the
places that wildlife live in your
yard, neighborhood or community
you might want to take a *closer*
look. Take an Outdoor Explorers Kit.
Include these tools to help you
become a ...
great outdoor explorer!

Collection jar

Camera

SAFETY RULES

1. Always tell an adult before you go exploring.
2. Never touch or hold animals with your hands unless an adult says it's okay. You may hurt it, or it may bite you.
3. Watch out for stinging insects like wasps and bees.
4. Never go near a hurt or sick animal. You might scare it and it could bite. Sick animals can also carry rabies and other diseases.

The collecting jar in your Outdoor Explorers Kit can be used to keep a worm or other small animal for a short while to get a closer look. Carry a small paintbrush to carefully remove any insects from leaves or twigs. Look and then let it go.



Remember
these **RULES**
and ...
the **TOOLS!**

Make an Outdoor Explorers Journal

YOU CAN MAKE IT!

1. Fold 12" x 18" paper in half to measure 12" x 9". Fold again to measure 12" x 4 1/2".
2. Now fold in half lengthwise to measure 6" x 4 1/2". Crease well on all folds.
3. Open to the first fold. Cut on the crease from the folded edge to where the creases meet.
4. Open the paper.
5. Fold lengthwise.
6. Hold two opposite edges. Push toward the center.
7. When the folds all meet in the center, fold the pages closed for a book.

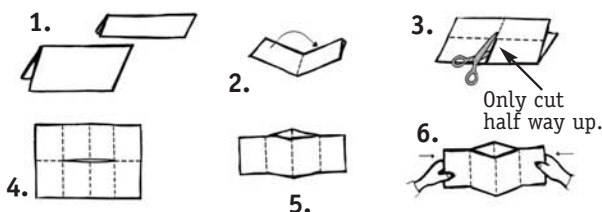


Use a notebook or
make your own
nature journal.

You can use
the same directions to make a
Scavenger Hunt Journal.

The most important thing in your
Outdoor Explorers Kit is ...
a nature journal or notebook!

Write about, or draw pictures of interesting wildlife
or plants you see. (What was the animal doing?
What was the weather like? Where did you see it?
What color was it? How big was it?)



Be sure
to observe
some interesting
ants!



"Color
the cover!"



Look for leaves or animal tracks. Note their shape. Draw a picture of them in your nature journal. Are the edges smooth or jagged? Check out the details with a magnifying glass.

A Scavenger hunt is a great way to explore nature in your yard, neighborhood or park. Check these off when you find them.

- ___ 1. a track ___ 2. a feather ___ 3. a nest ___ 4. an insect ___ 5. a mammal ___ 6. a bird ___ 7. a reptile ___ 8. an amphibian ___ 9. a hole for an animal ___ 10. a wildflower ___ 11. a spider web ___ 12. a seed ___ 13. an arthropod ___ 14. a nut ___ 15. a pinecone ___ 16. a leaf

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Adapted from *Exploring Our Watershed Fun Folder*®

Summer Institute to introduce educators, community partners

Mark your calendar for the Summer Institute. Slated for August 17-18, it kicks off the upcoming two-year cycle of involvement for Discovering PLACE educators and partners.

Since the 2011-2012 school year is dedicated to professional development – when teachers work with partners to develop curriculum projects based on student and community needs – the summer institute serves as an important introduction between teachers and partners. As the school year and project ideas develop, the focus will turn to aiding educators in writing grants for funds to implement projects during the 2012-2013 school year.

Please watch your e-mail for more summer institute announcements.

Note from Danielle



*Danielle Gartner,
Discovering PLACE
Program Manager*

appropriate structure for Discovering PLACE.

At the end of my afternoon of reflection I found myself thinking, WOW, we've come a long way! Some of you were a part of those planning meetings, held at the King's Karate-Ka Studio and UM-Flint's campus, and others who weren't have been carrying

the torch, helping to shape what we've grown into today. So, thanks to all of you for helping bring the vision to life!

I'm beyond excited about the progress that's been made. Place-based education projects are on the ground in Beecher Community Schools and Westwood Heights School Districts thanks to the dedication of Discovering PLACE teachers and our community partners. These projects engage students and ask them to tackle some of the biggest concerns we have in our communities.

We'll be starting our third year of work in the Flint area, and I'm delighted to say that Discovering PLACE will be building greater depth in the schools where we already work, in addition to bringing on new schools in the Flint Community School District. Furthermore, new community partners are adding to the breadth of our upcoming programming. So, stay tuned, we've got some challenging but thrilling work to tackle in the months to come!

We want to hear from you!

Send place-based education stories, tips for connecting students with their communities, or success stories to be included in Flint Currents, the newsletter of Discovering PLACE to Danielle Gartner at danyg@umflint.edu.

Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (GLSI)

Protecting the Great Lakes through hands-on learning in the community.

The GLSI was established and is funded by the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, with additional support from the Wege Foundation. Other funders include Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Community Foundation for Muskegon County, Fremont Area Community Foundation, and Frey Foundation.

The goal of the GLSI is to develop knowledgeable and active stewards of the Great Lakes. The GLSI funds eight regional hubs that provide leadership, expertise, materials, and financial resources to support the collaborative, community-based work of K-12 teachers, their students, and local organizations.



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