

Growers News for the Week of March 19, 2018

Prior to Spring break, the 5th graders enjoyed the fruits of their labor, so to speak. The Growers had promised a dessert party for any class that had 100% participation in earning money for the class tree. The students jumped on that opportunity and on Thursday during their recess period they were presented with the biggest batch of desserts you could ever wish to have put in front of you. One thing that can be said for the Growers volunteers is that in addition to being good gardeners, they also know how to cook and bake. We suspect each fifth grader gained 5 pounds. Normally the Growers emphasize healthy eating and some of the desserts were actually healthy, but some were just plain sinful! One of the favorites was dirt cake. Of course that would be a favorite in a gardening program!

We are happy to have the students back. The garden is growing like a weed or maybe we should say like vegetables in the spring. A number of volunteers stepped in last week on both Tuesday and Thursday in the students' absence, to plant, harvest, weed, water, prune, and generally tend the plants. The weather has been great and in spite of the cold January, the past six weeks have been ideal for gardening. Things to be harvested this week will be carrots, collards, lettuce, radishes, sugar snap peas, spinach and various herbs. All tomatoes have been planted, potatoes are already a foot high, and onions are growing nicely. Peppers and eggplant are being planted now. Okra will be planted shortly. As you can tell it is a busy time in the gardens.

Most of our citrus lost its leaves due to the freeze in January. All of them have quickly put on a new set of leaves and now are busy blooming. We think we only lost one little lemon tree and a few limbs on several other lemon trees. Normally lemons are pretty tough but this year the very cold weather was tough on them. From the blooms on the orange trees it appears they should have a good crop. One unknown factor is how many bees will actually be available to pollinate all the blooms. While we use no pesticides in the gardens, we don't know how many native and honey bees die from overuse of pesticides in the neighborhood. At one time we had a wild hive on the school property but that is no longer there, so we are at the mercy of wild bees to do the pollination that needs to be done at the school. Mr. Langridge and Mr. Opperman spent most of a morning pruning trees in the orchard. They also put up a new Martin house donated by Mrs. Kiefer. The Martins are already back from South America and are setting up housekeeping in the Martin house by the garden shed. They return to that house every year. We are hoping some will move to the new orchard house.

Over the past few years due to wind storms and old age several of the trees in the playground area have been lost. The Growers have approved the installation of a new irrigation line that will water the new 5th grade tree as well as the one planted last year for former principal Wasilewski. In times of drought, it is important to irrigate new trees if you wish them to thrive. With this addition, we hope to be able to add more 5th grade trees along this line which will run down the north side of the track. Thanks to approval by Mrs. Schmidt and the administration the forest at Oak Forest will continue to grow. Thanks to your donations for jam and preserves we were able to fund this addition.

The OFE Growers love volunteers! Now is a great time for 4th grade parents and grandparents to join us as volunteers for next year. Let us know if you would like to help and to learn to garden at the same time. Mrs. Krenek is our president. Do talk to her or send her an e-mail at: deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net, if you have questions. You can also learn about the OFE Growers and see pictures of the students in action in the gardens by going to their web site at: www.ofegrowers.org. The web site is constantly changing. Recently a complete layout of the newly repositioned gardens was added. <http://www.ofegrowers.org/garden-layouts.html>.

Let's all show our Falcon Pride by eliminating litter on campus and recycling as many items as we can. It makes our campus shine! If everyone picks up one piece of litter daily we will be spotless! Have you recycled your soda can or water bottle and picked up a piece of litter today. Be an example! If you don't, who will?