

Growers News for the Week of May 28, 2018

Well, we are in the final week of school gardening. For most students that is a sad situation but a happy time as they graduate to Middle School. We have had a wonderful year with this year's crop of fifth graders. In spite of the weather surprises thrown at us this year, it turned out to be a good one! The harvest totals underscore this. Again, we loved our fifth grade gardeners, and hope that they learned to appreciate where their food comes from and perhaps become gardeners themselves.

This week we will be celebrating the gardening year with our annual harvest festival. It is always a fun occasion! Growers' volunteers prepare a lunch from produce raised by the students, including a English muffin pizza fixed to each students desire. Some of the treats will include a cheesy squash casserole, rosemary roasted potatoes, coleslaw, fresh vegetables with the students' favorite dip, ranch dressing. It is rumored that there will be zucchini bread and carrot cake, and a few other surprises. During the celebration the total harvest figures will be revealed. Every class, of course, wants to top last year's total produce grown. We shall see if this class harvest was more than that of last year.

This past week the morning classes combined in Mrs. Krenek's room for a whole hour spent on honeybees. They even had a surprise visit from two beekeepers with a teaching hive. It was repeated for the afternoon classes. Each student was able, if they wished, to taste honey from the hives of Mr. and Mrs. Opperman, two of the Growers volunteers. This lesson always is a student favorite and causes much discussion during the lesson. We always hope that this lesson fosters a new appreciation of honeybees and pollinators in general and their importance to our well being. We also hope that we dispelled many of the fears students may have about these valuable insects.

We would love to welcome you as a volunteer for next year. If you can't help, maybe you know someone who could. We do need parent, grandparent, and community volunteers to keep the gardens going. Mrs. Krenek has been our president for the past so many years. We're happy for her that she is retiring at the end of this year but we will miss her very much. She has built a strong program and we are confident that it will continue to be a part of OFE for years to come. She tells us she will be back as a volunteer! If you have questions, you can still contact her. You can also learn all 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. A big "thank you" to Karen Langridge! She developed the web site and has maintained it in the past few years. Karen, too, is retiring from this volunteer position at the end of the school year. Job well done, Karen! Anne Mitchell will be following in her footsteps as web master.

During the summer the garden keeps going and growing. If we are not careful, by the end of the summer the new 5th graders would be welcomed by a whole garden full of weeds. To keep that from happening the volunteers and students come on Thursday mornings from 9 to 10:30. After an hour of work, they harvest what is available that day and divide it among those who have helped. Students under 16 are required to come with a parent, grandparent, or older sibling who also is willing to work. We also preserve some of the summer harvests including figs, pears, grapes, tomatoes and cucumbers. In the fall, these items are then offered for a donation. In part these donations fund the gardening program. Donations are always welcome!

Even if you can't help this summer, do stop by the school to see the gardens. Things are always changing. Sweet potatoes are being planted right now. They love the summer heat and soon will be covering many of the garden beds.

A big thank you to everyone who has made this one of the best student gardening programs in the City and County. **Oak Forest is a special place!** Do check the web site in June to see the total produce grown in the gardens this school year! www.ofegrowers.org