

This week marks the beginning of the OFE Growers 15th year of working with students at Oak Forest to bring them science and math experimentation in the OFE Gardens. When this program was first envisioned by Debbie Krenek and Vivian Cardoso, who are both now retired OFE teachers, the thought was to have an area where students could have a hands-on gardening experience. The first garden was a plowed area on the south side of the building. Mr. Wolf, a friend of the Kreneks hauled in trailers of soil amendments and did the plowing. A picture of that first garden in 2003 is on the front cover of the student gardening manual. How the program has grown since then! At the end of the last school year, the main garden was officially dedicated as the Deborah Krenek Teaching Garden.

Over the years, hundreds of parents, teachers, and community members have volunteered thousands of hours to make the garden areas what they are today. In the past calendar year, over two tons of produce was grown in the gardens. During the school year almost all produce goes home with 5th graders. During the summer, excess produce is preserved to be used as a fundraiser to pay the garden expenses. During the last school year those expenses were over \$9500 for materials, supplies, and spending on new infrastructure. In addition to sales of the preserves, we were able to obtain grants from ExxonMobil and an \$800 contribution from the PTA. Your help in donating generously in our “donations for preserves” program are important to keeping the program alive for future students at the school. If you have not ordered preserves and wish to do so, please contact hoppergo@aol.com to order product.

This week, the volunteers will meet with two classes of 5th graders on Thursday. During this orientations session, volunteer teachers will take the students on a pictorial tour of the campus and the areas they will be working. Safety is always an important lesson and will be emphasized during this orientation. **Safety is No Accident!** Mrs. Sanders will be discussing “good garden practices” and what is expected of the students. Students will also get a chance to meet the awesome volunteers who give up one day a week to teach the students so many valuable lessons.

The Growers also maintain a web site: www.ofegrowers.org. Here you will be able to keep up with what is happening in the gardens and check out all the pictures taken each week. Take a look and let us know what you think in the comments section.

We are a diverse group of mostly retired people. We would love to have any parents, grandparents, or community members give us a hand in maintaining the gardening program at the school. The OFE Growers are a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner is one of the 5th grade science and math teachers and is the president of the Growers organization. If you would like to join a fun group of garden volunteers running this program, get in touch Mrs. Fortner to get started. You need not be a vegetable gardener. Actually, you can keep your hands clean by helping keep up our database created last year to keep records to help in our gardening efforts. You could also be our web master. (See above) Volunteer, Denton Langridge, our interim web master, would love some help. Are you good at photography? We can use a photographer as well. We supply the camera. You would have to attend classes on Thursdays to catch students in action. Give Mrs. Fortner a call at 281-641-2834 or e-mail her at: emily.fortner@humbleisd.net, if you have questions or can help in any way.