



Herd work helps garden grow

A rain garden is in the works at Wesley Willows.

By Mike Wiser

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

[Click here for more information about Mike Wiser](#)

ROCKFORD — Dozens of students from Montessori elementary school pounded the soil underneath their feet just like the herd of bison they were told to imitate.

But the kids were doing more than pretending to be animals. They were doing the work that herds of wild bison used to do across the Midwest prairie: pushing grass seed into soil so the seeds will one day germinate and grow.

The seeding — the students had spread seeds just moments before — and the stomping were part of a project to create a two-acre rain garden in an otherwise unusable section of the Wesley Willows retirement community property off of Rockton Road.

A rain garden is a planting of prairie grasses and flowers designed to absorb and filter storm water instead of allowing it to flow into streets, rivers and streams unabated.

"A lot of the prairie grasses grow down instead of up first with their roots going down 12 to 18 inches," said Brian Leaf, development director with Severson Dells Nature Center which organized the planting.

"So what you have is something that takes up the water that would flow into this drainage area before it flows out into the road or sewers ... We call these plants nature's kidneys."

It's also low maintenance for Wesley Willows since planting doesn't have to be mowed.

But there are other benefits as well, said Kathleen Siedenburg, director of marketing and community relations for Wesley Willows.

"We wanted something that would be eco-friendly and beautiful," she said. "This will be."

Severson Dells, along with the Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District and Pheasants Forever, selected the seed mix with about 50 species of native prairie plants.

Brian Russart with the conservation district said the varieties selected will give the plot a bloom cycle that runs from spring to fall once the plantings mature in about three years.

"Some of it will come up yet this year, but give it about three years for the whole effect," Russart said as he shoveled scoopfuls of seed and sand mixture into plastic buckets for the children to spread.

"I'm going to come back and visit," said Max James, a sixth-grader at Montessori who will attend West Middle School next year.

"I want to see how what we planted today looks."

James said he already knew a lot about plants, plant ecology and plant biology before he came to the center with the rest of his class Thursday and he enjoyed the day being outside instead of indoors.

But he did learn a few things.

"I didn't know that the buffalo planted seeds with their feet on the prairie," he said. "Never heard that before."

Staff writer Mike Wiser can be reached at 815-987-1377 or mwiser@rrstar.com.



GARY L. CARLSON | ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

Brian Leaf of Severson Dells (center) leads the kids from the Montessori Elementary School and residents of Wesley Willows in a buffalo stampede as they plant a rain garden in a drainage area at the complex.

Classified Partners: Jobs: CareerBuilder.com - Cars: Cars.com - Apartments: Apartments.com - Shopping: ShopLocal.com

Home | Local News | Sports | Business | Nation/World | Entertainment | Espejo | Travel | Forums

Copyright © 2007 Rockford Register Star.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license.

