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A New School Garden for Portola Elementary

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By Patricia Koning

Students at Portola Elementary School can hardly wait until the corn, squash, beans, strawberries, carrots, herbs, and other fruits and vegetables in their school garden begin growing. The school now has seven fully planted raised garden beds with complete irrigation systems, seating in the garden, and flower boxes for each classroom thanks to a community effort that encompasses the school, Livermore School District's Campus Catering, Livermore BELIEVES, and the City of Livermore.

"This is really a great thing for the kids at our school," says Kim Farrand, coordinator of Livermore BELIEVES. "It was really a wonderful collaboration to get this project going, with lots of support from different agencies."

On Saturday, April 25 the school held Family Day in the Garden at which parents, children, school staff, Livermore Rotary members, Boy Scout Troop 2391, several Girl Scout troops, and community members worked together to reestablish the school garden. Farrand says the old garden was basically nonexistent since the school underwent renovation a few years ago.

"There's a lot of excitement about restoring the school garden," says Portola principal Maria Ramirez. "We're grateful for the community support, donations by local businesses, and Kim Farrand for making this project happen."

Portola science specialist Paula Glines says the school's Science

Lab will utilize the garden space in the fall for Life Science studies. "Teachers will also be using their individual garden plots to teach student responsibility and caring, which in turn reinforces what I teach in Science Lab," she adds. "Family Day in the Garden carries on our tradition of involving students, parents, and staff to work together in the spirit of community and 'Portola Pride' to make our school a beautiful place to learn and grow."

The garden project started with a \$2,500 Garden Grant from the California Department of Education, Nutrition Services Division in partnership with the Network for Healthy California office at the Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE). In the fall, a Portola Garden Committee was formed with Farrand and Ramirez; Barbara Lee, Sally Reese, and Jamie Jessup from Campus Catering; and Frances Reisner and Tim Shurtleff from the City of Livermore's Housing and Human Services Department.

"As we began discussing the potential of the Portola garden, excitement really flourished," says Lee.

Joan May, one of the school's cafeteria workers, started growing plants from seed for the garden. Reese and Jessup along with some Portola parents attended Urban School Gardener training sessions offered by the ACOE.

On May 21, the regular ACOE Urban School Gardener training session will take place at Portola. "Other districts in Alameda

County that have been participating in the Urban School Gardener training will come to Portola to see what we have done and also help with planting for a hands-on learning activity," explains Lee.

She intends to use produce from the garden in Cooking Together classes next fall. Cooking Together classes are funded by a grant from the Kaiser Permanente Community Benefits program and produced by Campus Catering. Classes have been held at Portola and Marylin, and this spring, at the Livermore Farmer's Market.

"The garden provides us another opportunity to encourage healthy habits and the benefits while teaching healthful cooking techniques. We are always open to partnerships that benefit the health of the students and build community," says Lee. "We are proud to be connected to a great project that will have short term and long term benefits for the students."

The Livermore BELIEVES program will care for the garden and incorporate it into their academic enrichment activities. Farrand says BELIEVES will use the garden for partner reading, art lessons, and studying insects and plants among other activities.

BELIEVES stands for Broaden Enrich Lives, Instill Educational Values, Encourage Students and is funded through a Proposition 49 After School Education and Safety (ASES) Grant. Both Portola and Marylin have BELIEVES programs, which are free of charge and open to any student at the school.