



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Stormwater lesson from MWRD inspires local students to action

Water professionals help Skinner School construct rain garden



MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan chips in with students of Skinner North Classical School to construct a rain garden that soaks up rain water and keeps the students' playground dry.



Skinner North Classical School students, staff and water professionals with the Central States Water Environment Association and MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan paused during construction of a new rain garden.

When a group of students from Skinner North Classical School learned about the importance of stormwater management from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), they decided to take action on their own campus.

Members of the First Lego League Girls Robotics Team, known as the "Cistern Sisters," partnered with the Central States Water Environment Association (CSWEA) to respond to a flooding issue on their playground by creating a rain garden. On May 14, CSWEA members, students, parents and staff created a rain garden that will protect their playground area from flooding and enhance their schoolyard at 640 W. Scott St., Chicago.

MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan, whose granddaughter TaSandra Watson attends the school, heard of the project and said she could not resist stopping by to lend a hand, even picking up a wheelbarrow of dirt.

"I was so impressed with the students of Skinner North to take the initiative to build this rain garden that I had to stop

by and visit," said Vice President McGowan. "It is invigorating to hear about students who understand the need to take ownership of our stormwater because if future generations of leaders can grasp this now, we know that our environment will be protected for years to come."

The Cistern Sisters consisted of third, fourth and fifth graders Mei Li Fitzgerald, Alina Zhao, Zofia Brzezniak, Ellen Tang, Elaine Tang and Katherine Barton-Sedey who designed the project. They heard about a similar project the MWRD was participating at nearby Manierre Elementary School during the annual Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and Conference (WEFTEC), and they decided to see if they could accomplish a similar project on their playground. The team connected with CSWEA, which pulled together the resources, and the students recruited their fellow classmates to provide the labor. The partnership and goals of the students aligned with CSWEA's mission.

"In our industry we are constantly wanting to engage our youth through tours, experiments, and educational materials - including WEF's World Water Day-actually getting *(continued)*

Stormwater lesson from MWRD inspires local students *(continued)*

to be part of this wonderful adventure is awe inspiring. How exciting to take an idea from our youth, create a plan, and implement it,” said Sue Baert, CSWEA president

CSWEA, which is comprised of water professionals from Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin and members of the Water Environment Federation (WEF), conducted the project in conjunction with annual meetings that occurred in Oakbrook Terrace May 14-16.

As part of the design, the new rain garden was installed to capture stormwater instead of it running into an overburdened stormwater system. The project included backfilling the rain garden with gravel and topsoil to create underground water storage, and planting native species that can sustain growth with wet soil and uptake water. Design and plant selection were developed by Spirited Gardener. The deep basin was dug 18 inches and filled in with about three cubic yards of gravel, nine yards of soil swale mix and followed by native plantings, included sedges, rose swamp milkweed, gay feathers and Echinacea plants, according to Julia Bunn of Spirited Gardener, which graciously donated time and resources to the garden.

The excavation was generously performed by the Chicago Department of Water Management. Midwest Trading provided soil and Midwest Groundcovers provided plants.

“It’s critically important that we create the next generation of citizens committed to water conservation,” said Chicago Department of Water Management Commissioner Randy Conner. “That is why I agreed to support this project which engages kids in learning about our water system.”

Lastly, the MWRD provided needed tools and equipment to help bring the project to reality and delivered a new rain barrel to accommodate the school’s new rain garden.

“The MWRD is thrilled that we can be a part of a student-driven initiative that serves multiple purposes,” said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “We have partnered for many years with WEF, Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Department of Water Management to construct gardens during WEFTEC so this additional project is a wonderful extension of this partnership.”

To learn more, visit www.cswea.org.

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Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwr.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for used water treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.