

## 'Wild School' idea takes root Students plant flower garden



By [IGNAZIO MESSINA](#)  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Seven-year-old Keera Siers meticulously dug a small hole yesterday in front of Our Lady of Lourdes for the school's new garden.

After she was done patting down the soil, Keera stood up and admitted that the little plant leaned to one side.

"That's OK," she said. "It will grow toward the sun, right?"

Ten-year-old Kyle Voyles plants a columbine in a 40-foot-diameter garden in front of Our Lady of Lourdes in celebration of National and Global Youth Service Day.

( THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT )

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All 180 students attending the Catholic school got outside yesterday morning to plant a new native wildflower garden - which the school's leaders say will make them a "wild school site" with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

Principal Carol Farnsworth said the students were taken to Oak Openings Preserve Metropark in the fall to explore different species of plants and flowers native to the area.

"They voted on the plants that they wanted to use," Ms. Farnsworth said.

The 40-foot diameter garden project also is in celebration of National and Global Youth Service Day, she said.

About half of the \$2,000 project is paid for through a grant from State Farm Insurance Cos., and Youth Service America.

U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D., Toledo) arrived to talk with students and then got down in the dirt to help. She told the students that Lucas County is the top flower-growing garden county in Ohio.

"You go to other parts of Ohio, you put a shovel in the ground, and good luck if anything grows - it's all full of rocks," Miss Kaptur said.

Tom LaVergne, information and education specialist for ODNR, said he will visit Our Lady of Lourdes soon, but he's confident it will get the designation.

"We try to get schools do something outside the building, and we do this with inner city schools that plant just a four foot-by-four foot area or a school that does a very large area," Mr. LaVergne said.

There are four other wild school sites in northwest Ohio: Chamberlain Elementary in Findlay, Clay High School in Oregon, Henry County Outdoor Education Center in Napoleon, and Hicksville Elementary in Hicksville.

Susan McGonnell, principal of Chamberlain Elementary, said her idea in 1993 to create a lab and nature center outside the school earned it the ODNR designation in 1997.

"It became this five-year project to build this outdoor nature center," she said. "It has just turned into this extra classroom outdoors, and I find us using it with multiple subjects."

The site has only native species and about 30 different kinds of trees.

After speaking to the students at Our Lady of Lourdes, Miss Kaptur talked about other initiatives she's involved with this spring. Next month she will help launch a campaign, along with the Maumee Valley Growers Association, to plant Purple Trailing Petunias along the Ohio Turnpike between Toledo and Lorain.

"We would like to make this the bloom coast of Ohio," she said.

Miss Kaptur will speak Friday at the St. Francis Education Center on the campus of Lourdes College to encourage young people to help replace trees in Lucas County cut down because of the emerald ash borer infestation.

Contact Ignazio Messina  
at: [imessina@theblade.com](mailto:imessina@theblade.com)  
or 419-724-6171.