

For Immediate Release

Contact: lsanker@umflint.edu

Leyla Sanker: (810) 424-5477

Area Funder Supports Park and Habitat Improvements at Flint School

Flint, MI (October 24, 2016) – Building on 5 years of place-based education projects, more than 120 Flint Southwestern Academy students helped complete a “blue and green infrastructure” project on Cronin Derby Downs in early October. The project was funded by Discovering Place and a grant from Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN).

Cronin Derby Downs, a city of Flint park next to Southwestern Academy, is identified as a “blue/green corridor” area within the City’s green infrastructure plan, which was adopted in 2013 as part of the Imagine Flint Master Plan. This seasonal pond, or vernal pool, is approximately ¼ acre in size, and will be surrounded by native grassland vegetation and will be used as an outdoor teaching space.

Teachers partnered Genesee Conservation District staff with students over several semesters to design the wetland and determine where a suitable site would be. The most recent phase is aimed at planting wetland grasses and allowing rain runoff and snow melt in spring to provide fresh water for wildlife. After winter, students will plant additional landscaping on the site. Duck families have been nesting in the high school’s interior courtyard for years but had to be relocated because it was not an ideal location for the animals. This new habitat will create both an outdoor learning space and a viable nesting ground for the birds.

Lead teachers Kim Hatfield and retired teacher Linda Heck have been leading these place-based education projects through support from UM-Flint’s Discovering Place program. Place-based education uses the students’ local community and environment to teach larger concepts. Ms. Hatfield said the vernal pool gives students a sense of ownership by helping transform the area to a wetland. It’s amazing to see the project grown, involving more than 200 students. She said it is also great that other students who couldn’t help build the site will be able to reap the benefits long after it is completed.

Genesee Conservation District staff have partnered with classes at Southwestern for three years to teach students about the habitat’s importance. They also helped students find where water naturally sat on the school site and partnered with the city of Flint, who owns the park land, to integrate the students’ ideas with Flint Master Plan green and blue infrastructure goals.

Angela Warren, Genesee Conservation District, said this wetland restoration project will get students outdoors to enjoy nature and gain an understanding of how they impact the environment and how they can improve the world around themselves.

Integrating place-based education into the classroom also supports the school’s International Baccalaureate program, which focuses on developing knowledgeable and caring young people into leaders through intercultural understanding and respect.

For more information on this project, please contact Leyla Sanker at lsanker@umflint.edu

About the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network: The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network is a community-based, voluntary initiative that connects people, resources, organizations, and programs. The group works to improve the quality of life by developing projects, supporting related organizations, and developing the region’s identity as a sustainable community.

About University of Michigan-Flint’s Discovering Place: University Outreach’s Discovering Place works with Flint-area teachers to implement class projects which connect students with their surroundings. These place-based education (PBE) projects are designed around required curriculum to meet a need in the local community or environment. Funding for Discovering PLACE is provided by the Great Lakes Fisheries Trust through the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative.

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