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Valley students join global project

Seven schools will help in test of new planter designed for arid climates

Michelle Mitchell • The Desert Sun• October 15, 2010

Palm Springs students left the classroom on Thursday to participate in a global experiment designed to prevent climate change, deforestation, hunger and poverty.

“I think it's good because we're going to be a part of this,” Raymond Cree Middle School seventh-grader Mirna Mosqueda, 12, said.

About 50 Raymond Cree students planted native trees in the Whitewater Preserve using the “Groasis Waterboxx” — an innovative planter designed to allow trees to thrive even in harsh or damaged land.

With the help of local students, inventor Pieter Hoff is perfecting the waterboxx by testing it in harsh conditions on every continent.

The American test plants are planned for areas surrounding the Coachella Valley and the area damaged by the 2006 Sawtooth wildfire.

“If I can prove that it works here, then nobody will doubt that it can work in their own garden,” said Hoff, a native of Holland.

The waterboxx is designed to provide inexpensive and sustainable irrigation using condensation — and no energy.

Initial experiments show that the waterboxx is about 90 percent successful in allowing plants to grow in desert, rock and land damaged by drought, flood, fire or strip mining.

Thursday was the first day in a three-week planting period to restore the natural vegetation that will include students from seven schools in Palm Springs, Cathedral City and Desert Hot Springs.

They will return in a few months to measure the progress of their plants — which will also be planted in the Pipes Canyon, Mission Creek and Dos Palmas areas.

It teaches students about science and native plants, but also gives them tangible exposure to complex and sometimes abstract global issues.

Plant your own — waterboxx family day

Pieter Hoff, CEO of AquaPro, demonstrates the simple design of the Groasis Waterboxx, which is a planter that is self-sustainable with an initial source of 16 liters of water. Some 180 of the planters will be used in an experiment at the Whitewater Preserve. The planters where put together by Raymond Cree Middle School students. (Omar Ornelas The Desert Sun)

Raymond Cree Middle School students (from left) Maria Nuño, Dajanae Alexander and Maia Alvarado assemble a Groasis Waterboxx at the Whitewater Preserve. (Omar Ornelas The Desert Sun)

Raymond Cree Middle School student Miguel Maldonado pours water into a Groasis Waterboxx planter at the Whitewater Preserve. About 50 students from the school took part in the work. (Omar Ornelas The Desert Sun)

"It brings them closer to the problems the world
to solve," said Jaap Veerman, deputy consul ge
for the Netherlands Consulate, which donated
$2,000 for transportation and drinks for the stud
planters.

"It's something that they'll remember when they'
grown."

Hoff eventually sees the waterboxx in the hands
Third World farmers who can't afford irrigation
systems and governments reforesting land.

Restoring natural plants and habitat can attack r
problems by creating more fertile soil, increasing
groundwater, providing food and fuel, and reduc
the carbon dioxide blamed for climate change.

"I said to the children, it's not my problem, but it'
going to be your problem and you're going to ha
to solve it," Hoff said.

"Let's replant the world, that's actually what I wa
he said. "We have to reclaim all the land that we
destroyed."

The Whitewater Preserve is hosting a Family Waterboxx Planting Day on Saturday.

Plantings will happen from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Activities for all ages, such as guided nature walks and restoration projects, will be held from 10:30 a.m. to noon.

The Whitewater Preserve is at 9160 Whitewater Canyon Road.
Information: (760) 325-7222