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TUITT STUDENTS PLANT SEEDS OF SUSTAINABILITY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ECO SCHOOLS USVI

ST. THOMAS, USVI – Jane E. Tuitt Primary School launched its Backyard Gardening Project in conjunction with the Virgin Islands Conservation Society’s Eco Schools USVI program on October 6, affording second and third grade students, with the help of My Brother’s Workshop, the Coast Guard, and Rotary Sunrise, to construct gardening boxes that will be installed across the campus.

Eco Schools USVI, introduced to the territory’s schools by Valerie Peters, program director, seeks to bridge gaps across the public and private sectors by exposing students to concepts of sustainability through the establishment of environmental programs, such as Tuitt’s Backyard Gardening Project.

Tuitt Principal Thelca Bedminster expressed her satisfaction with the launch of the program.

“We had the pleasure of attending an Eco Schools workshop and we were excited about it because we were looking for ways to join the efforts of our math and science classes, along with the whole concept of recycling, renewing, and reusing to bring that outside perspective into the classroom,” she said.

Peters said Tuitt's Backyard Gardening Project falls in line with new science standards schools are required to adopt.

"This is to help create a clearly laid out map of what schools are doing in environmental initiatives, so that if the schools engage in gardening, we wanted to bring together the private and public sectors to help the schools, and bring their expertise and resources--whatever they can do to help them," she said. "It helps the teachers because the curriculum that's aligned with this is aligned with Next Generation Science Standards. These are all new standards that they have to adapt to and this is going to help them transition."

Scott Bradley, founder of My Brother's Workshop, reflected on the role his organization played in the project.

"We do this stuff all the time," he said. "Whenever we have volunteer groups or we have the time, we do classes and train high-risk kids. Part of the kids' training is we are training them to be carpenters and electricians, so this is good for their training. It teaches them a sense of giving back."

Students were filled to the brim with excitement as they learned how to assemble the gardening boxes while safely and responsibly using tools, as volunteers from the sponsoring organizations shared their expertise.

Vincent Henley, Department of Education agriculture director in the St. Thomas-St. John District, coordinated the access to seedlings and soil needed for the initiative. The school's math and science teachers, with Henley's assistance, will help students nurture and harvest their crops.

Students expressed their excitement about participating in the project and the prospect of harvesting their first crops.

"Today, I built a box and used a drill," said second grader, Jahnai Jackson. "I garden at home, too, and I'm going to grow peas in the school garden to eat."

Bedminster looks forward to the growth and expansion of the program.

"The hope is that we begin to grow and incorporate what we grow into the functions of the school," she said. "Part of it will be for school lunch, but we like to incorporate things like bush tea so that it can be available in the nurse's office and for staff, as well."

The principal concluded by reminiscing on Tuitt's vegetable harvests in recent years.

"Last year, we would have bags of tomatoes and okra available for...parents and community members. It was fun," Bedminster said. "It made the students more aware of the concept of giving and growing. With the help of the math and science teachers, we are going to be able to help the students to make those connections that they can become entrepreneurs, they can grow their own food, they can make a business out of it, and they can understand more of what they put into their bodies and be healthier."

For more information, please contact the Office of Public Relations at (340) 774-0100 ext. 8136.

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