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Blooming birds and reading nooks

(Submitted by Fruitport Middle School sixth grade Surf City students)

If you are passing by Fruitport Middle School (FMS), take a minute to stop and check out the new courtyard garden. Surf City's sixth grade students have been working hard the past two years to create a peaceful space for people to gather. They hope this garden will be enjoyed and utilized by students, staff, and community members.

This project would not have been started without the work of two teachers, Jacquelyn Ball and Jeanne Olovson, and FMS custodian Bruce DeVries. Mrs. Ball and Mrs. Olovson applied for a Learn and Serve Grant through the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District two years ago to begin phase one of the garden. Surf City students worked hard during the 2007-2008 school year to write proposals, clear the area, and prepare a section for a small patio. Unfortunately, the school year came to a close and there was much work to be done. Mr. DeVries, our talented middle school custodian, jumped in and worked vigorously throughout the summer and into the new school year to lay the patio, plant shrubs, and place hand-made unique boulders.



Mr. DeVries laying the patio pavers during the second phase.

Our garden was actually beginning to look like a real garden when the students arrived at the start of the 2008-09 school year. They were greeted with a beautiful area to utilize; however, our work was not yet complete. Our new Surf City students began preparing the second section for benches (reading nooks), birdhouses, a path to connect all the areas, and planting new seedlings and bulbs.

Again, Mr. DeVries worked diligently with us throughout this process, but our funds began to run low. At this point, we applied for a grant through the Fruitport Foundation, and were so excited to receive additional funding. Through this grant, the students in Surf City worked with Mr. Stahl, industrial arts teacher, to construct the benches, birdhouses, and bird feeders during the winter months. They couldn't wait to place them in the garden when the snow melted.



Mr. Finn leading the jazz band on stage during the unveiling.

With the arrival of spring came an even larger project: Preparing for the garden's unveiling. Students in Surf City raked the ground, trimmed the bushes, and made a variety of projects for that special night (luminaries for the pathway, bird baths, toad houses, watering holes, garden stones, gazing balls on sticks, garden signs, moss houses, bird feeders, a ladybug house, scrapbooks of all three phases, window art, signs for the big night, sidewalk art, and fresh flower arrangements). Every student (90 of them) contributed to the garden each year.

With our dollars running low once more, we then received a wonderful donation from the Pierce family. We used it to build an outdoor stage in our garden. Our FMS jazz band and choir performed on it for the unveiling. We also received generous donations from Prestige Landscaping, Flowers by Ray and Sharon, Master Tag of Whitehall, and various community members and Fruitport Community Schools staff and students.

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Drivers with disabilities should use The Pump Guide

(Submitted by the Michigan Department of State)

Motorists with disabilities can make their travels easier by remembering *The Pump Guide*.

The Pump Guide is an on-line directory of gas stations statewide that offer travelers with disabilities full service at self-service prices. The site, found at www.ThePumpGuide.com was created by the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America, a nonprofit organization.

"As people with disabilities plan a fun trip across our great state, their first stop should be to *The Pump Guide*," Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land said. "The site allows them to map out their trip ahead of time with the assurance that full-service gas stations are ready to assist them."

To qualify for refueling assistance, drivers are required to display a state-issued disability license plate or placard.

The Pump Guide's on-line program allows users to:

- Search for stations by county.
- Identify stations near a specific location or by ZIP code.

• Plan a trip using directions that include participating stations along the route.

More than 900 gas stations statewide participate in *The Pump Guide* program. In addition to locations and hours, the guide also lists those stations that include car washes, ATMs, accessible restrooms and other amenities. The paralyzed veterans organization gets its information from an annual mailing to gas stations.

Although all this work had been done, our garden was not quite ready for the unveiling. We needed to add a special place for our past principal, Gordon Mol. We wanted to honor him for all he gave to our school, our students, and this great community. For Mr. Mol, we made a special place in the garden, so he would always have a place here at Fruitport Middle School.

Now it was time for the unveiling — May 12, 2009. It was special for all our students in Surf City to present the Mol family and Pierce family with a special "thank you" at the unveiling. It was a beautiful spring evening and several parents, staff, and community members were there to share in this special occasion. The choir sang a beautiful tribute to Mr. Mol and his family and the FMS jazz band entertained us with their talent for the remainder of the evening. Punch and snacks were served by students and parents and there was much socializing among those in attendance. We even had a slide show of all the stages playing in the library for people to view, thanks to Mrs. Sorenson.

Where is this garden? It is located outside of our library. If you are coming from outside of the building, take the sidewalk next to the Early Childhood Center, and you will see the split-rail fence and garden sign. We hope that community members, as well as our students, will walk the winding trails, sit and read on the benches, see all the beautiful flowers and animals, and enjoy the hard work that everyone has put into this beautiful place. It is truly a peaceful place, and it is no wonder the students of FMS picked "FMS Peace Garden" for its official name.

If you would like to continue to support our garden area, checks can be sent to FMS Garden, c/o Fruitport Middle School, and made payable to FMS. Also, if you would like to donate bulbs, plants, etc., please contact Jacquelyn Ball at 865-3128, extension 3064. We view our garden as a "growing" project and look forward to adding an outdoor classroom area, two picnic tables, and greenhouse in the years to come.

Stop out this summer and enjoy our beautiful garden! •



Patio portion of the garden complete with a fountain.



Memorial garden dedicated to former principal

Story and photos by Harry and Heidi Wojahn

Principal Gordon Mol was a man the community looked up to, admired, and loved for his kindness and warmth.

Jacquelyn Ball, a 1987 FHS graduate, now a teacher at the Fruitport Middle School, remembered his greeting the students every morning as they walked into the school.

The new garden at the middle school, built with donations by Dr. and Mrs. Pierce, has been dedicated to Mr. Mol's memory. And a plaque in recognition of the Pierce family's donation has been placed in the garden. •

Elderhostel offers travel program featuring Michigan lighthouses

(Submitted by the Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce)

Elderhostel, a unique, affordable six-day travel program for older adults, featuring Michigan lighthouses and other old houses, is being hosted by the Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce from Sunday, September 13 to Friday, September 18, 2009. Discounts for local travelers apply.

Discover the lighthouses, floating houses, Victorian homes, art houses, a 1940's depression house and entertainment houses of West Michigan. Explore the lives of families who lived in these unique homes. Experts will focus on architecture, history, usage, and inhabitants.

Learn about the lighthouses that played a central role in guiding ships through dangerous and stormy waters. Explore a restored cross-lake ferry, a submarine, and an LST that were homes to passengers and the military. Visit a maritime museum, several 19th century historical mansions, and exquisite houses where the performing and fine arts tell the stories of artists of all types.

Elderhostel is the world's largest not-for-profit educational travel organization for older adults, offering more than 8,000 learning adventures every year in all 50 states and in over 90 countries around the world.

For more information about the Muskegon's Elderhostel, contact Pat Shafer at the Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce, 231-722-3751 or pshafer@muskegon.org. •

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Dale Lee @ 231-777-3732

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