

SETTING DOWN ROOTS

Students help celebrate Arbor Day

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MAZON — Mazon-Verona-Kinsman Grade School students got their hands dirty Friday afternoon planting an Autumn Blaze Maple tree at their school in celebration of Arbor Day.

This is the fourth year Spring Grove Nursery owners Jamie and Becky Thomas have donated trees to plant at the school in celebration of Arbor Day. The couple grew up in Mazon and now their children attend M-V-K.

"We love trees and helping educate kids about trees and about why they're important to us," said Becky Thomas.

Thomas said she and her husband both attended that school as kids and have good memories of it. But most of the school's trees are older now, she said, and planting new ones now will insure a beautiful site for years to come.

For the past three years, the Thomas' have been letting their daughter's classes help plant the trees, Maggie is in fifth grade now. But this year, they thought they would give their son Joey's kindergarten class a chance to plant a tree.

M-V-K kindergarten teacher Alicia O'Keefe said her and Michelle Meyers' students were excited at helping plant the large tree. It's something they will be able to see grow from

year to year and can tell their kids in years to come that they had a hand in planting that tree.

O'Keefe said the kindergartners have been preparing for the Arbor Day celebration by studying about trees in class.

"We've been learning about what a tree can be when it grows up," O'Keefe said. "And yesterday, we read 'Franklin Grows a Tree.'"

The Thomas' came in early in the morning with crews to dig the hole behind the kindergarten classrooms on the north side of the school, and to bring the 500-pound balled and burlapped tree to school grounds.

Later in the afternoon, the Thomas' came inside the school and spoke to the kindergartners about trees. They explained why trees are good for the environment, help save electricity by shading houses, and are just beautiful things.

Then they went outside where Joey and his mother read a poem. Workers moved the tree into the hole, then the students removed the burlap and took turns shoveling in dirt.

Earlier that day, the Thomas' had driven to Lemont to help with Arbor Day celebrations at the park district there. One group, Lemont Environmental Commission, had purchased 31 trees from Spring Grove for their

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Michael Cornale and Jamie Thomas roll a 500-pound, 3-year-old autumn blaze maple tree into a hole outside MVK Elementary School in Mazon on Friday. (Herald photo/Adam Nekola)

Arbor Day

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own celebration. Students were there, too, Thomas said.

A national Arbor Day actually began in the treeless plains of Nebraska in 1872. Pioneers there, such as J. Sterling Morton, missed the trees of back home. Trees not only provided beauty, but they were good ways to break the harsh winds that tore through the plains, to keep hold of the soil, and to provide fuel and building materials.

They also provided shade for the hot Midwest summers.

A newspaper editor, Morton advocated tree planting in his articles and proposed a tree-planting holiday to be called Arbor Day.

It was estimated that more than a million trees were planted in Nebraska on that first Arbor Day, April 10, 1872.

Other states followed Nebraska's example, and today Arbor Day is celebrated in every state. The most common date for the celebration is the last Friday in April, but some states set their Arbor Day at other times to coincide with the best tree-planting weather.



Kindergarten students at MVK Elementary School pose behind the tree that they helped plant on Friday in celebration of Arbor Day. (Herald photo/Adam Nekola)



Kindergartners Christopher Collett and Alma Ruiz shovel dirt around the roots of a newly-planted tree outside their school on Friday. (Herald photo/Adam Nekola)

The Value of Trees to a Community:

- The net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day.
- Landscaping can reduce air conditioning costs by up to 50 percent, by shading the windows and walls of a home.
- A mature tree can often have an appraised value of between \$1,000 and \$10,000.
- Landscaping, especially with trees, can increase property values as much as 20 percent.
- One acre of forest absorbs six tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide and puts out four tons of oxygen.
- Planting of trees means improved water quality, resulting in less runoff and erosion. This allows more recharging of the ground water supply.
- Research shows that visual exposure to settings with trees has produced significant recovery from stress within five minutes, as indicated by changes in blood pressure and muscle tension.