

Guerneville School gardens growing thanks to Council rain catcher funds

by Amie Windsor Sonoma West Staff Writer amie@sonomawest.com | Posted: Wednesday, March 2, 2016 4:00 pm

The Guerneville School garden keeps getting better, thanks to the installment of a rain catcher, funded by the nonprofit North Coast Resources Conservation and Development Council (Council).

“The kids are really excited about it,” said Richelle Stoufer, who teaches the garden program at the Guerneville School.

Stoufer’s program exposes students to the garden for an hour a week. She’s worked with the students recently on how to catch rain at home and expanded that conversation into conserving water on school grounds.

“The rain catcher really ties into the garden class,” Stoufer said. “I showed the kids what the catcher was, including the roof, how the funnel worked with the gutters. It’s great for the kids to see the process.”

Stoufer said Guerneville was chosen to receive the rain catcher by way of “school garden connections.”

“I gave a presentation at the Gravenstein Apple Fair last year,” Stoufer said. “My booth was right next to Oona’s.”

It was Oona Padgett, water conservationist for the Council who was in charge of the rain catcher installment program, that Stoufer was next to that day.

One thing led to another and a relationship between the two women was born.

“It was a wonderful connection,” Stoufer said.

On Feb. 6, the Council installed a tank at the Guerneville School with 20 community volunteers taking advantage of the sunny weather to install a tank while building the collection roof. The group prepared the gravel base and constructed the ring foundation, then set the tank and built most of the conveyance system. With the help of parents and students the project took about five hours, Stoufer



How does your garden grow

Brian Heacock, Oona Padgett’s husband, teaches middle school students at Guerneville School about water conservation during the installment of the school garden’s new rain catcher.

said.

“It was neat to see parents and kids involved together,” she added. “The parents were up on the ladders while the kids were telling them what they knew about the garden.”

Last weekend, the Council returned to the school to connect the tank to the gutter system and conduct outreach regarding rain catchers with 26 junior high students who helped finish up the tanks and overflow to be ready for next series of rain events.

“The students at the school really get involved in these projects — they help us build them and they learn about water conservation in practical terms,” Padgett said. “Then, they take that message of water conservation home and spread the knowledge among their family and friends.

During their return, Padgett led a lesson teaching students how much water their garden used and how much water the water tank saved, providing them a tangible ratio of water use and conservation.

Targeting underserved areas, the Council is furthering water saving efforts and helping youth learn about water conservation through school projects and associated curriculum. These conservation efforts demonstrate the importance of savings rainwater for use during drier months when water is critically important to people, fish and wildlife in the region.

The rain catcher installations and outreach are funded by the Strong Foundation for Environmental Values and the Exchange Bank Foundation. The Council is a local 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization working in Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino and Lake Counties. The Council’s overall goal is to protect water, soil and air resources while enhancing sustainable communities.