

Rockwood Centennial receives first ever Gold School Award

**By Rebecca Ring,
Acton Tanner, April 30, 2009**

Wellington County honoured Rockwood Centennial Public School with its first ever Green Legacy Gold School Award for “their outstanding commitment to the environment and involvement with the Green Legacy Tree Planting Programme,” throughout the 2007/2008 term. The school is the first in the Province to have every single student in every grade commit one day of the school year to help grow and plant trees.

Mayor Chris White presented the students with the award on April 29, saying, “It’s amazing to see children committed to improving the environment at such a young age. I am pleased to present the students of Rockwood Centennial with the first Green Legacy Gold Award. It’s my hope that others will be inspired by their efforts.”

Students in Kindergarten to Grade Three planted seeds in class in March. They cared for the block of seedlings until June, watching them grow to 12 to 18” seedlings. They were then transported to the Green Legacy Nursery where they joined over 150,000 other seedlings destined for planting throughout the County. Students in Grades Four to Six spent one day at the Nursery where they transplanted, watered, weeded seedlings. They then went on a bio-diversity walk on the “Little Tract;” the 200-acre forest surrounding the Nursery on Cty. Rd 34 in Puslinch.

The land was donated to the County by John Little, a bachelor farmer who wanted to leave a legacy of reforestation. Students in Grades Seven and Eight planted thousands of seedlings on participating local farms.

“The children see every step that it takes to grow a tree. As the kids grow, they will see how long it takes to replace trees that are cut down,” says parent-volunteer and programme organizer Libby Little, “It gives them a connection to their community as they see the trees they planted grow over the years.” She adds that the kids set a good example for the rest of the community, which she says needs to mobilize to reach the minimum recommended tree coverage of 30 per cent. Currently, tree coverage in Guelph/Eramosa is at 20 per cent, and 19 per cent for the GRCA watershed in general. “At the current rate of planting from all sources, it will take 500 years to reach that goal,” she says, “So we need to get everyone involved – from children to seniors. The Rockwood students have shown us the kind of involvement that is possible and needed in the greater community.” This year, 15 schools and over 5000 students in the Upper Grand District School Board will be participating in the programme piloted by Rockwood Centennial.

Tracey Darling, a kindergarten teacher at Rockwood Centennial, said, “It was a meaningful hands-on experience for everyone, even for children as young as Junior Kindergarten.”

“This project is not only one that encourages and rewards our schools and students for their commitment to the environment, it also supports the ongoing attention that the Ministry of Education is focusing on environmental education and stewardship,” said Bob Borden, UGDSB Chair.

UGDSB Trustee Ralph Edwards commended the students, saying Rockwood Centennial is the best school in North America, and thanked Libby Little for all her hard work and dedication.

Schools and landowners who would like to participate in the Green Legacy Programme can contact Rob Johnson, Green Legacy Tree Nursery Manager at (519) 837-2600, ext. 3030.