

Schools gain living lesson in shade trees

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BY JENNIFER H. CUNNINGHAM
STAFF WRITER



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CLIFTON — Nearly a dozen city schools will get an extra dose of shade after a crew from the New Jersey Tree Foundation began planting 74 native trees.

The foundation's tree crew spent Wednesday planting young maple and dogwood trees on green space at schools across the city.

The newly planted trees will help the schools reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, while teaching students about plant species in the local environment, said Al Du Bois, city recycling coordinator, who is overseeing the plantings.

"It's what you call a reforestation of our schools," Du Bois said. Reforestation replenishes plants in areas depleted of them.

"I think it has a tremendous impact," Du Bois said, "not only on the students ... [but] for those riding in the area."

The "Green Streets, Cool Schools" program — administered by the non-profit New Jersey Tree Foundation and DuPont Co. — donates trees and labor to create greener school grounds and teach the public about the importance of urban forestry. Under the program, 11 Clifton schools will get trees.

The Green Streets, Cool Schools program has been operating since 2005. Schools within the Lower Passaic River and Arthur Kill watersheds are eligible to apply for the trees.

The tree program also provides temporary, transitional jobs for parolees. Neal Buccino, a spokesman for the state Parole Board, said finding a job after serving prison time is one of the biggest obstacles parolees face. Through the tree program, parolees learn landscaping skills while earning money.

"Programs like this are a real benefit for public safety," Buccino said.

To date, the tree planting has created jobs for about 30 parolees, he said.

Over three years, Clifton has added nearly 300 trees for public and private schools through the Green Streets, Cool Schools program. This year, St. Andrew the Apostle School on Valley Road will receive eight trees, DuBois said.

The number of trees a school receives is based on the amount of open space on its campus. More information can be found at: newjerseytreefoundation.org/GreenCities.asp.

The new trees will save energy by providing shade in the summer and acting as a wind buffer in the winter. The trees also release oxygen and store carbon dioxide in the roots and trunk.

At School 4 on West Second Street, kindergartners watched in delight as the tree crew planted a single red sunset maple in front of the school. David Montroni, principal at School 4, said that although much of the campus is paved, he was pleased to receive the tree.

"Is a tree going to help a kid learn?" Montroni said. "No. But it will beautify the environment."

At Woodrow Wilson Middle School on Wednesday morning, Lisa Simms, director of the New Jersey Tree Foundation, along with about a half-dozen of the "tree crew," planted six maples and dogwoods on the school field. Planting the trees may inspire students to be more active in their environment, she said.

"If they see you doing something good for the environment," Simms said of encouraging the students, "like planting a tree, they'll see that it's important and hopefully mimic that behavior when they grow up."