

Making friends with nature

Ventnor students get a lesson in trees, courtesy of SJTA

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Staff Writer

VENTNOR — A pink dogwood tree sits outside the Ventnor Educational Community Complex, thanks to the efforts of the South Jersey Transportation Authority.

"Make a friend of out it. He's a new member of the Ventnor elementary school," said John McDonnell, project manager for the South Jersey Transportation Authority and one of the guest speakers Wednesday at the school prior to the planting.

This year, the SJTA partnered with four schools to plant trees and butterfly boxes in honor of Arbor Day, including at the Slaybaugh School Complex in Egg Harbor Township and Woodbine Elementary School.

On Wednesday, the authority made its final visit to the Ventnor school to talk with the second-, third- and fourth-grade students about the importance of trees. Joining authority officials was Steve Mars, a biologist from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The word 'arbor' actually means celebrate trees," Mars told the more than 150 students gathered for the assembly. "Over 100 years ago, a president by the name of Teddy Roosevelt, he decided it was really important to

honor trees."

In addition to the many benefits of trees to humans, Mars also discussed the different types of animals that eat the nectar provided by trees, especially butterflies.

Mars said that monarch butterfly boxes being installed in the school's garden area would aid in pollinating the plants. He said the Wildlife Service could help the school by providing more plants so that the school could receive certification for a pollinated garden.



MATTHEW STRABUK / FOR THE PRESS

Fourth-grader Frank Ulla-Solano gets a helping hand as he plants a tree Wednesday outside the Ventnor Educational Complex. See more photos with this story at PressofAC.com.

SJTA Project Manager Nicholas Marchese said the authority has been doing tree plantings at schools since the early 2000s. He said it's important to reach kids at a young age and teach them about the importance of environmental stewardship because they are the gatekeepers of the future.

"All of you are going to be the answer to our problems," Marchese told the students.

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Nicholas Marchese, of the South Jersey Transportation Authority, shows Ventnor students a bat house, saying bats can eat as many as 3,000 mosquitoes in one night.