



Port Townsend High School student Caitlyn Bedolla rakes bark into place during the community work project for Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday at the Blue Heron Middle School orchard. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

PORT TOWNSEND

100 people pitch in at Blue Heron orchard

Largest crowd yet makes quick work of annual MLK Day gathering

By Zach Jablonski

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PORT TOWNSEND — About 100 people got their hands dirty at the Blue Heron Middle School orchard, laying more than 50 yards of mulch around the orchard's 70 trees.

The annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day event sees dozens of volunteers each year, and Monday's event saw the most volunteers yet, organizers said.



Volunteers work to shovel up the last bits of bark to be spread around the trees in the Blue Heron Middle School orchard Monday as part of the annual community work day for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

While normally the work would take two hours to complete from start to cleanup, all the work was done and the space was cleaned up in under one hour.

“It’s pretty neat,” said John Polm, Port Townsend School District superintendent. “It’s the largest crowd we’ve had. It’s a great community event.”

Organizer Seth Rolland was impressed by the turnout Monday, which was made up of students, teachers, staff and community members.

“We had a really good crew,” Rolland said. “We had a lot of kids this year, which is great.”

The mulch was a combination of cow manure, biochar and alder chips, Rolland said.

Hermann Brothers donated 30 yards of alder chips; six yards of chips were donated by Shold Garden Center; one yard of biochar was donated by Francesco Tortorici of Olympic Biochar; and 20 yards of washed cow manure were purchased at a discount from Roger and Bill Short of Short's Family Farm, Rolland said.



Volunteers shovel mulch into wheelbarrows before spreading it under the fruit trees of the Blue Heron Middle School orchard as part of a community work party Monday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

The orchard also is being supported by a \$500 matching fund donation from the Port Townsend Food Co-Op, and anyone interested in donating is encouraged to contact Rolland at 360-379-0414 or sethrolland@gmail.com.

The funds help pay for the materials needed to maintain the orchard, such as the manure, chips and biochar, Rolland said.

The orchard initially had 20 trees that were planted in 2010. In 2013, 50 more trees were planted and an 8-foot-tall galvanized wire and cedar post deer fence was built, Rolland said.

The 70 trees include 12 varieties of apples, three types of European pears, four varieties of Asian pears, two types of plums and two varieties of figs, Rolland said.

“It seems that each year they’ve added more to the orchard, more bark and more people,” said volunteer Kevin Long, who participated in his fifth year of the event Monday. “It’s amazing.”

In the fall, more than 1,500 pounds of fruit was picked and went back to classrooms and lunch programs for the Port Townsend School District, Rolland said.

“One of the great benefits of this orchard from a gleaning perspective is that we have eliminated all the food miles by putting the fruit right next to the kids, enabling them to pick the fruit and creating a great potential for education,” Rolland said.

“It has been shown through school garden programs that kids are more likely to eat and enjoy produce when they see it growing,” Rolland continued.

“The project also introduces the middle school students, their teachers and parents to the practice of sustainable, organic agriculture. We planted the trees with all organic materials and fenced without plastic or pressure-treated woods.”



Volunteers spread the last of the bark under the 70 trees at the Blue Heron Middle School orchard as part of the community work party Monday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

The orchard also has been the topic of two senior projects for four students two of which built a website for the orchard that can be viewed at www.tinyurl.com/PDN-Orchard. The other two students raised funds and built a storage shed for tools needed for the orchard, Rolland said.

For more information on the orchard, email blueheronorchard@gmail.com.

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