

Blue Thumb Parties - Community Based Social Marketing in Action

According to Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith, the most effective way to educate people about the environment so that they change their behavior is to take a community-based social marketing approach. In other words, instead of just informing people about environmental problems, we need to give them the skills to change their actions, motivate them to act and encourage them with incentives. That's where the idea of the Blue Thumb neighborhood party comes into play.

On Wednesday, April 4, Connie Taillon, who is one of the board members for Brown's Creek Watershed District, hosted the first ever Blue Thumb House Party. At the shindig, Connie and ten of her neighbors learned about landscaping options for their yards that are attractive and promote water quality and about ways that they can work with the watershed district to get planting projects installed. The relaxed atmosphere of the gathering made learning fun, and people left excited about possibilities for their neighborhood and ready to schedule a site visit with conservation district staff.

Two more Blue Thumb parties are scheduled for April, one in Stillwater and one in Cottage Grove. If you want to host a party at your house or know someone who does, call Angie Hong at 275-1136 x.35 or angie.hong@mnwcd.org.



Neighbors in the North Legends area of Stillwater ponder landscaping options for a sample site.



Every chair was full at the Landscaping for Clean Water workshop on April 4

Full house at the Landscaping for Clean Water: Contractor Workshop

On Wednesday, April 4, we co-hosted a training for landscapers and installers that focused on raingardens and other landscaping techniques to promote clean water. We had 80 people pre-registered and another five to ten walk-ins. At the workshop Angie Hong spoke about the connections between streets and streams, Dawn Pape, of Rice Creek WD, spoke about the Blue Thumb Program, Gregg Thompson, of MASWCD, talked about residential landscaping and Jay Riggs, WCD, led participants through

an example of a commercial bioretention project. At the end of the workshop, three landscaping experts - Rusty Schmidt, Shawn Tracy and Diane Hilscher - joined the presenters for a panel discussion.

All in all, we received good responses from people attending the workshop, especially on the quality of presenters. The most common suggestions for improvement were to include more information about residential landscaping and more guidance on plant selection, hold a longer workshop and get a bigger room. This summer we hope to have a follow-up workshop in the field to give landscapers hands-on experience building a raingarden.

Take a hike in Washington County Parks

Starting on Tuesday, May 1, Angie Hong will be leading hikes in Washington County regional parks the first Tuesday of each month. The hikes, which will be co-sponsored by the East Metro WREP, Washington County Parks and the Sierra Club, will feature water resources in the area. The hike on May 1 will be at St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park in Denmark Township from 6-8pm. Parking is free in Washington County Parks the first Tuesday of the month. RSVP for the hike at angie.hong@mnwcd.org.



MS4 Toolkit \$\$

The East Metro Water Resource Education Program has won a \$40,000 grant from the MPCA to develop educational toolkits for MS4 cities and watersheds. We will be using the money to create educational materials for cities and other MS4's to use to meet their education requirements for SWPPP's.

Starting soon, Angie Hong will be contacting city staff in the east metro area to determine what educational materials and trainings are needed. If you have a wish list for materials to be included in the toolkits, contact Angie at 275-1136 x.35 or angie.hong@mnwcd.org.

Partnering with Washington County Master Gardeners to Educate the Public

In 2007, Master Gardeners in Washington County will be focusing on two major areas: 1) Landscaping for Clean Water and 2) Controlling Noxious Weeds. The East Metro Water Resource Education Program will be working closely with those Master Gardeners involved in landscaping for clean water and enlisting their help to educate the public about planting native gardens, creating raingardens and stabilizing shoreline with plants.

On Wednesday, April 18, we will be holding a training workshop for Washington County Master Gardeners. The workshop, which will take place in the nature center at Inspiration of Bayport, will cover how to use the Blue Thumb program as an educational tool, how to recognize wetlands (and what not to do to them) and how to create raingardens and other Blue Thumb plantings. Already, the East Metro Water Resource Education Program has worked with local master gardeners to design signs, brochures

and interpretive activities for the raingardens at the Washington County Fairgrounds and to conduct community education classes in Forest Lake and Stillwater. With the help of the master gardeners, we hope to teach more community Blue Thumb classes and to develop some hands-on training sessions utilizing upcoming raingarden installations.



Lynn Keller, a Master Gardener in Washington County, uses string to show the length of native plant roots at the 2006 county fair.

Welcome Rusty Schmidt to the WCD!

Rusty will be joining the conservation district staff in late April and will be working with residents to design Blue Thumb projects for local cost-share programs. Rusty comes to the WCD from URS Corp., where he worked on many successful landscaping projects including "10,000 Raingardens in Kansas City." Rusty is also co-writing a Blue Thumb homeowner's manual to raingardens with Dan Shaw of Great River Greening. The book should be in print by late May 2007.

Members of the East Metro Water Resource Education Program:

Brown's Creek Watershed District • City of Dellwood • City of Forest Lake • City of Stillwater • City of Willernie • Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization • South Washington Watershed District • Valley Branch Watershed District • Washington Conservation District • Washington County

