

2020 NACo Achievement Award Application

“Partners for Pollinators”

Cooperative Partnership Program between York River Academy, York County Beautification Committee, and Waste Management Division of Public Works

York County, Virginia

Abstract:

On October 16, 2018, students from York River Academy’s (YRA) Greenhouse Team, along with their teacher, Veronica Warwick, met with several representatives from the Department of Public Works and York County’s Beautification Committee. It was apparent at this first meeting that the organizations shared a number of common goals, including a focus on sustainable environmental practices and a desire to promote programs and products that are environmentally friendly. These three organizations have worked together to create sustainable gardens, to include native plant species, to provide a habitat for native species of pollinators. The Beautification Committee hosted the YRA Greenhouse team at the 2018 Clean Business Breakfast Forum, where they spoke about their initiatives in sustainability such as growing herbs to be used in products they are producing (such as lotions, soaps, etc.), and collecting plastic bags for recycling in the Trex Plastic Bag Recycling Program. YRA received the first bench awarded to the Beautification Committee in order to recognize them for their environmental efforts. In the time since this partnership was established, these groups have found a number of ways to coordinate efforts.

Need for the Program:

This partnership program allows the Beautification Committee, YRA, and Waste Management to share information regarding native plant species, pollinators, and sustainable environmental practices. Native plants are species that are found naturally in a region without human intervention, and are important because they support local ecosystems. Native plants are responsible for supporting native wildlife in their specific regions. Pollinators are important as well, because plant species are dependent on them to continue to survive. Many fruit, vegetable, and nut crops are provided by plant species supported by pollinators. A healthy pollinator population is crucial to maintaining a healthy ecosystem. This partnership allows the sharing of information between a committee of master gardeners, environmental stewards, and students with access to resources to advance sustainable practices, thus creating a wealth of knowledge and important practices.

Program Description:

The objective of this program is to provide a continuous opportunity to promote environmental education throughout the community. By creating a partnership between the schools and the board-appointed committee, we are able to continuously share ideas and education about sustainable practices and environmentally-friendly programs.

The partnership began through the relationship between one of the Beautification Committee members and the YRA Greenhouse Team (the committee member is also a Master Gardener/Master Naturalist, and was partnered with York River Academy through the Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H School Outreach Partner program). The member recognized that the YRA Greenhouse Team had many shared goals and suggested creating a dialogue to see how the organizations could work together.

In early 2018, the York County Beautification Committee began participating in the Trex Company's Recycling Challenge. This program allows organizations to collect unwanted plastic materials such as plastic bags, plastic film packaging, and wraps and send them to the Trex Company. Once the organization sends 500 lbs. of plastic to Trex within a six month period, they are eligible to receive a bench made from the Trex composite materials. The Beautification Committee committed to donating the benches to our local schools and libraries. The YRA Greenhouse Team collected the plastic bags that contributed to the first plastic bag collection period, and were awarded the first bench in October 2018. Since beginning participation in the challenge, the Beautification Committee/Waste Management Division (along with our local libraries) have collected over 25,000 lbs. of plastic to donate to Trex and have received four benches.

Following the dedication of the bench to York River Academy in the courtyard/greenhouse area, and the initial meeting between the organizations, the YRA Greenhouse Team was invited by the Beautification Committee to speak at the Virginia Peninsula Clean Business Forum quarterly award breakfast in November 2018. The team spoke about their business structure and plans, and their ambitious goals for the future. They shared their ideas on sustainable practices, and discussed the herbal products they were producing from plants grown in their own greenhouse. The audience was impressed with their knowledge and dedication to environmental education.

In 2019, the YRA Greenhouse Team was asked by the Beautification Committee and Waste Management Division to design a native plant garden to be located at the Waste Management Administrative Facility, capable of producing and sustaining pollinators. The students developed a plan for the garden, to include a pollinator-supporting plant list and rendering of the proposed garden. The Beautification Committee submitted a grant application to askHRgreen.org, a regional environmental education organization, and received a \$500 grant to purchase materials to plant the garden. Native plants were purchased to include (among others):

- Butterfly Weed
- Common Milkweed
- Rose Mallow
- Bee Balm
- Moss Phlox
- Cardinal Flower

On Earth Day, April 22, 2019, the groundbreaking was held and the garden was planted. An article was published in WYDaily on April 28, 2019, entitled ***There are no longer 'green meatballs' outside this building in York County.*** The article discussed how the partnership was formed, the plants that were removed to be replaced with native plants ('green meatballs' refers to plants not native to an area), and how important it is to support native plant species.

In the summer of 2019, the Demonstration Garden was registered as a Monarch Waystation and Waste Management staff recognized that Monarch Butterflies started laying eggs on the milkweed plants. The staff raised the caterpillars and released the viable butterflies for release during the summer. The YRA Greenhouse Team continued to support the garden's survival by weeding and mulching during regular visits. Bees, dragonflies, various butterfly species (to include Monarchs and Swallowtails), and other insects were regularly seen in and around the garden.

In early 2020, the YRA Greenhouse Team planted orange and white tulip bulbs in the garden in memory of three local students who died in a car accident earlier in the school year. Although not native plants, tulips are not invasive and will coexist beautifully with the native plants during their active spring, summer, and autumn months.

The Beautification Committee, YRA Greenhouse Team, and Waste Management Divisions have started discussions for the next phase of the garden. The goal is to expand the garden to include additional pollinator-supporting native plants and provide a living ecosystem to provide visitors and the public about environmentally important and sustainable practices.

Program Cost:

The York County Beautification Committee received a \$500 grant from askHRgreen.org, a regional environmental education organization, to purchase the materials to start the Demonstration Garden. Beautification Committee volunteers donated their time to obtaining the plants, and they were housed at the Waste Management Facility until they were planted. Public Works Grounds Maintenance removed the existing plants from the grounds in front of the Waste Management office. Waste Management received in-kind donation of compost and mulch from the VPPSA Compost Facility located at the rear of the Waste Management Operations grounds. The students provided the labor to install the plants.

Startup costs for the garden included the native plants, soaker hoses, and a spigot nozzle to be set on a timer. The education grant provided the funds needed to start and support the garden.

Maintenance of the garden is provided by volunteer labor (by the students) and Beautification Committee members.

Results/Success:

The partnership program between these organizations has provided the local community with a wealth of environmental education. The presentation by YRA Greenhouse Team at the forum breakfast brought attention to the activities of the students in sustainable practices. The article in WY Daily provided our citizens with information about native plants and pollinators, and how important both are to a sustainable environment. The Demonstration Garden produced numerous Monarch Butterflies (Waste Management staff released at least 18 viable Monarchs during the summer).

The garden will provide an ongoing pollinator site. Because the intention is to continue the maintenance and expansion of the garden, we anticipate a pattern of increased growth in the pollinator environment.

Since we started our partnership with Trex, we have recycled over 25,000 lbs. of plastic bags. The redirection of this plastic from the landfills to the Trex recycling location is an overwhelmingly positive result of this program.

Worthiness of Award:

This program highlights a public/private partnership between local government, local schools, citizen participation, a national corporation, and local business. The program also highlights the regional partnership between local government and the VPPSA Compost Facility and enhances their ability to reach out to members of the community. The redirection of a significant amount of plastic and the contribution to a diminishing pollinator population (and how we can help educate the public on how to help as well) is important to promoting a healthy environment and strong ecosystem. By revitalizing the existing space, and utilizing existing county resources, we can help our citizens and our environment.

Supplemental Materials

2018 Clean Business Breakfast, Yorktown Freight Shed (YRA Greenhouse Team Present)



Garden Groundbreaking April 22, 2019



Garden 1-Month Progress



Trex Containers (Collection Receptacles for Plastic Bags)



Monarch Released from the Garden

