



Horticultural therapy: A school, a greenhouse and fields of green

Laura DePrado, Final Touch Plantscaping 12:03 p.m. EDT May 16, 2016

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Seventh grade students and teachers of the Bridgewater Raritan Middle School with Laura DePrado of Final Touch Plantscaping, LLC, touring Hionis Greenhouses. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Brenda Hockstein)

READINGTON - Fifteen seventh-graders with various learning challenges from the Bridgewater-Raritan Middle School visited Hionis Greenhouses and Garden Center in Whitehouse on April 8.

The goal was to create a pre-vocational experience for the students to learn about the six-plus acres of commercial greenhouse production, its functions and products, including Jersey Grown, and to learn how to incorporate those plant products into their school greenhouse for plant sales at school.

Students and teachers explored and engaged in “fields” while learning about many of the aspects of plants, science and the horticulture industry in the United States and New Jersey’s position within the top 10 of that industry.

“The Horticulture Industry in New Jersey is the State’s largest Agriculture sector with 42 percent gross sales. This includes nursery, sod, horticulture and floriculture,” according to New Jersey Department of Agriculture Alfred Murray, assistant secretary.



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It produces more than \$350 million annually in nursery sales and 40 to 60 percent of that, depending on the years, of those plants grown in New Jersey are sold in New Jersey. When you are purchasing plants at your local garden center, chances are they are not only being sold there, they are being grown in the state.

Science teacher Susan Ward said, "Hands-on gardening transformed what our students learned in the classroom into valuable teachable moments in the community. Gardening fostered independence and an appreciation of the natural world they live in."

Special education teachers Camille Mammolite, teaching assistant Jackie Capro and teaching assistant Gail Stemmer also joined the tour.

Hockstein added, "Through growing different types of flowers like Midnight Blue Petunias and herbs like basil and cilantro, students have become active learners and observers through this prevocational program."

At school, students are growing herbs like basil, oregano, cilantro and vegetables like beans, radishes and tomatoes. Additionally, they are growing flowers donated by Hionis.

The greenhouse was dormant for many years until teachers wrote a grant and Hionis donated supplies. The greenhouse was installed when the school was built. With grant money, temperature control issues were fixed and now the greenhouse is successfully being utilizing.

"The township of Bridgewater is blessed with the beauty of our natural open space and many landscaped gardens. As mayor of our community, I am inspired by the partnership among the BRMS staff, the Hionis family and our students and I congratulate their effort to enhance our community," Bridgewater Mayor Dan Hayes said.

If you would like to contribute to the Bridgewater-Raritan Middle School greenhouse program, contact special education teacher Susan Ward at sward@brrsd.k12.nj.us.

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