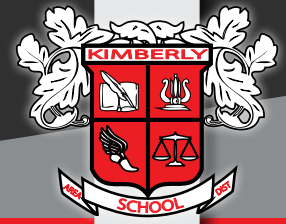


# School Matters



Special Insert  
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School News for Residents of the Kimberly Area School District



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Superintendent

With Earth Day and Arbor Day both in April, it is a relevant time to write about a natural resource I am especially proud of - our School Forest. We are fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources in our community, from the Fox River and Lake Winnebago to the many park and trail systems. Our community is especially fortunate to have a nearly 20-acre School Forest as part of the property surrounding Kimberly High School. Donations from individuals and organizations have provided funds to build an open-air and a sheltered classroom in the forest. As more educators use these resources, children of all ages are experiencing the School Forest as a place to learn about and enjoy the natural world.

-- Bob Mayfield

## School Forest Grows from Community Support

The School Forest at Kimberly High School is a point of pride for the community. It truly has been a collaborative effort to become an inspiring place to learn about the natural world. With such a unique environmental resource available to Kimberly students, the schools are able to use the forest for learning in many interesting ways. New ideas for using the forest abound, especially since donations have provided for the construction of open-air and covered learning centers.

Kimberly High School is located on a hill overlooking the nearly 20-acre School Forest. It features a trail system through wooded portions, tall-grass prairie areas and Garner's Creek, a stream that runs the length of the land. Ever since the high school opened in 2001, a heron rookery that is home to as many as 27 nesting birds, has fascinated students, staff and community members alike. Within the property, several structural remains from the former Wiedenhaupt farm can be found, including building foundations and silo pieces.



### Designation as a School Forest

For several years the Environmental Education class at Kimberly High School performed stream analysis lab tests on Garner's Creek. After science teachers Dean Simon and Katie Heling attended an Environmental Education Conference, they posed the question, "Why not use the woods on the high school property as a designated school forest?"

Six years ago, the KASD school board approved the plan and passed a resolution to designate the area to the south of the high school as an official School Forest. The permitting process continued and a temporary designation was achieved from the State of Wisconsin. The School Forest designation became official in the 2011-2012 school year.

By having the forest designation, the District is able to apply for grants to create educational opportunities for students at all grade levels. With the help of Calumet County Forester Frank Kirschling, they began brainstorming ideas. Project Green, an environmental student club at KHS, also has an avid interest in the school forest.

### Open-Air Outdoor Learning Center

In early 2013, the District received a generous donation from Marie Ruys to support the construction of

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an open-air outdoor learning center in the Kimberly High School Forest. Her meaningful gift has provided a space for students to study and appreciate nature. This gift provided a significant step forward in the development of the forest as a learning resource.

A grant from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) was used to create an Education Plan that integrated the school forest into curriculum district-wide. The Education Plan was drafted by a team of district educators on a School Forest Committee. Their goal was to connect multiple subjects in grades K-12 to the school forest.



The learning center and Education Plan's curriculum provide students with the possibility of more hands-on learning options, including staging areas for students to gather for instruction. Students currently access the forest for science classes, such as ecology, biology, earth science and Advanced Placement Science studies. Art and photography classes also find inspiration in the setting. There are many new opportunities that can be developed for students such as outdoor art classes, night astronomy viewings and scientific observation of the heron rookery.

"There is always something new and interesting going on in the forest and Garners Creek," said Katie Heling, science teacher at KHS and Project Green advisor. "Students of all ages can explore the forest and creek, studying different concepts at varying levels of complexity. There are activities that students of all ages enjoy and learn so much from- such as collecting and identifying organisms in the creek."

### ***Outdoor Learning Shelter***

Last school year, We Energies approached the District with a cooperative proposal – they were interested in using a small portion of District-owned land to house a small utility regulator facility and in return they would provide funds to benefit Kimberly students.

The partnership provided the following new opportunities for Kimberly students:

- Creation of a new student scholarship related to trades at a two-year technical college
- Donation to support construction of an outdoor learning shelter in the School Forest
- Educational sign in the school forest

With the financial support from We Energies, a new covered outdoor learning shelter is being constructed. This facility allows for more educational opportunities because it offers protection from the weather.

The Building Construction 2 class at Kimberly High School, which takes on one to two community focused building projects each school year, came forward and offered to construct the new shelter. These students are learning valuable hands-on skills under the direction of educators and area experts while making a lasting contribution to our community.

This project inspired additional support from local companies, too. County Materials has donated a large portion of the foundation pavers and provided education to the KHS students on how to properly install the pavers. The contributions of the pavers and the construction work by KHS students, allows the school to put more of the shelter's budget into enhancing the structure itself.



Our students benefit from the support of the community in so many ways. Through these new opportunities, they will graduate better prepared for college and careers. "There are lessons to be learned that only the outdoors can provide," said Dean Simon, science teacher at KHS and Project Green advisor. "A full education should always include trips into nature."

Donations are welcome to further develop the learning centers and the School Forest. They can be directed to the High School to the attention of Principal Mike Rietveld or teachers Dean Simon and Katie Heling.