

District Launches Sustainable Science Project/Collaborative Groundbreaking Restoration of Otter Creek Preserve

*Mamaroneck Schools Foundation Grant & Web of
Community Partnerships Support Initiative
at Mamaroneck Avenue School*

MAMARONECK, NY, May 4, 2017 -- The Mamaroneck School District today announced a unique collaboration between the Westchester Land Trust (WLT), Mamaroneck Schools Foundation (MSF) and the District to develop a sustainable science program featuring native plant restoration of 35 acres of tidal wetland at the Otter Creek Preserve in Mamaroneck. Annually over a three-year period, the program at Mamaroneck Ave. School (MAS) will involve participation of more than 700 children and 170 teachers, as they study botany, ecology and sustainability and benefit from real-world STEM learning.

MAS is creating a science lab to study, propagate, and grow native trees, shrubs and herbs. The plants will grow first under lights inside in the science lab and then in the MAS Community Garden, where they will be hardened off and grown further, until they are finally planted into the Otter Creek Preserve.

A MSF grant will fund the purchase of materials and equipment needed to grow the plants and provide microscopes and other study materials, as well as conservationist visits for the students to Otter Creek Preserve, located just two miles from Mamaroneck Avenue School. The grant also will fund architectural designs (required by the NY State Education Department) for a proposed greenhouse that will benefit future programs and learning for students at MAS.

Turning 'Students Into Stewards'

In recent years, our District's elementary schools have participated in environmental initiatives incorporating experiential learning, such as the work the schools do with Sheldrake Environmental Center. The Sustainable Science/Otter Creek project -- the idea of which was conceived by the STEM Alliance of Larchmont-Mamaroneck -- builds on those initiatives and gives students the capacity to engage in authentic learning that shows them first-hand how to be conservationists and active stewards of the land.

"We will take the naturalist concept a step further -- teaching our students to become stewards of the land, taking care of the plantings and using both the sustainable science lab and the Otter Creek Preserve as vibrant places of learning," said Mamaroneck Ave. School Principal Ginny Lockwood. "I cannot think of a more beautiful way to introduce students to the Next Generation Science Standards than through this hands-on habitat restoration project."

By growing and installing nearly 200 native plants each year, the students at MAS will restore or improve wildlife habitat for hundreds of species of migratory and forest-dwelling birds, enhance

living resources for many mammals and reptiles, and will also improve water quality for amphibians, fish and other marine life.

Westchester Land Trust President Lori Ensinger said, "The opportunity to engage students in the stewardship of Otter Creek, an incredible natural resource in their community, creates a unique and lasting relationship between them and the land. This project is a perfect example of Westchester Land Trust working together with public and private partners to preserve land in perpetuity, and we are pleased to be part of it."

The Sustainable Science lab is serving as a temporary home for the future greenhouse. A school-wide assembly, including a ribbon-cutting and science lab preview, is slated for Wednesday, May 10, after school, beginning at 2:20 pm.

"The Mamaroneck Schools Foundation is excited to fund this innovative educational and environmental grant which will provide students with authentic hands-on learning as they raise native plants for reforestation at Otter Creek Preserve while learning about botany, ecology, and sustainability," said MSF President Cecilia Absher.

The STEM Alliance's President, Margaret Käufer, adds, "This partnership goes hand in hand with our goal of creating educational experiences that have children involved in applied solutions for the improved health of the Long Island Sound, our local nature preserves and our planet." Students from the STEM Alliance's Co-Op Summer Enrichment program will help launch the work this summer. They will participate in ecosystem field trips to Otter Creek while also growing the native seedlings that will be eventually be planted there.

About the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation

The Mamaroneck Avenue School Sustainable Science/Otter Creek Preserve grant is one of twenty-five programs in the Mamaroneck School District awarded grants through the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation for 2017-18. MSF celebrates over twenty years of awarding teacher-initiated grants, making possible innovative programs that have touched the lives of thousands of students throughout six schools in the Mamaroneck School District. Since its inception, MSF has awarded more than 455 grants totaling almost \$4.2 million in every discipline, including STEM, arts, literacy, health and wellness, and much more.

About Otter Creek Preserve/Westchester Land Trust

The 35-acre Otter Creek Preserve is the largest privately owned tidal wetland designated and protected as a nature sanctuary in Westchester County. Located along a three-mile stretch of coastline on the Long Island Sound, Otter Creek has long attracted birdwatchers and wildlife lovers. The vibrant mix of coastal waters, marsh, wooded wetlands and uplands makes the Preserve an important site for migratory birds, marine life, insects, reptiles and amphibians, fish, and mammals. Otter Creek was designated a Geologic Area of Particular Concern by the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation in 1978, and shortly thereafter, the Village of Mamaroneck declared it a Critical Environmental Area. WLT acquired Otter Creek Preserve in April of 2015 as part of a transfer from The Nature Conservancy. It is the most ecologically diverse of the organization's 29 land-holdings and is WLT's largest preserve in Southern Westchester. Otter Creek is open to the public year-round at no cost and offers unique passive recreation opportunities along its ¾-mile long loop trail. Otter Creek is located at the end of Taylors Lane in Mamaroneck. For more information, visit www.westchesterlandtrust.org

About the STEM Alliance of Larchmont-Mamaroneck

The STEM Alliance is a grassroots, non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing K-12 STEM education and enrichment initiatives to benefit students, parents and educators in our schools and community. As an Alliance, we are a dynamic group of parents, educators, students, alumni, business leaders and community members. Some of our work includes engaging a dozen partnerships to increase STEM offerings, creating "girls only" programs for STEM learning, starting local robotics teams, designing a project-based STEM summer curriculum for at-risk students and hosting our area's only large scale, hands-on STEM festival. For more information, visit: www.lmstemalliance.org

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