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Thursday, April 26, 2007

Scotchtown Hills gets a little bit greener on Arbor Day

by Steve Earley | Staff Writer

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Speakers at an Arbor Day celebration at Scotchtown Hills Elementary School on Friday encouraged pupils to take ownership of the 29 trees they were planting that day, and by extension, the earth itself.

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“These trees will be your trees,” R. Calvert Steuart, Prince George’s County’s Beautification Committee chairman, told the pupils during a morning assembly in the school cafeteria. “You’ll be able to come back to Scotchtown Hills 10, 15, 20 years from now and say, ‘Golly, there’s the tree I planted on Arbor Day.’”

With those inspirational words, the school’s 630 pupils set out into sunny, 60-degree weather and took turns shoveling dirt over the roots of two-and-a-half-foot-tall trees including redwood, dogwood and maple.

The trees, provided by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources’ Tree-Mendous Maryland program, were planted in clusters near the school’s parking lot, playground and athletic fields.

Friday’s festivities marked the 12th consecutive year the county celebrated Arbor Day at an elementary school. Steuart said Scotchtown was picked in part because of its Green Team, a group of 20 fourth- through sixth- graders that meets weekly to collect recyclable items and do beautification work on the school grounds. One project was the butterfly garden that pupils planted near the cafeteria.

Scotchtown Elementary, in Laurel, is also a Maryland Green School, a distinction schools in the Chesapeake Bay watershed can earn for including environmental education in their curricula and for completing environmental projects in the



Susan Whitney-Wilkerson/The Gazette
 Scotchtown Hills Elementary School kindergartner E tree with his fellow pupils for the county’s Arbor Day Friday.

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Scotchtown pupils have constructed reef balls — artificial oyster habitats — to be placed in the bay, and painted “Do Not Dump” warnings on storm drains.

Establishing an environmental club like the Green Team was one of the recommend activities for a Maryland Green School, said fourth-grade teacher Jessica the group last school year.

“I was a Girl Scout. I love this stuff,” she said.

A few days before last week’s celebration, the Green Team was tasked with removing weeds from “It’s actually fun pulling out weeds because you’re with your friends,” said Whitney Fowlkes, an grader.

Sixth-grader Elizabeth Yang, 11, who designed the club’s neon green “Got Green?” T-shirts, said “people know that kids can help too.”

Maryland Department of Natural Resources representatives also presented Prince George’s County consecutive Tree City USA award.

A proclamation read during the assembly satisfied the last of four requirements jurisdictions must award, which is given by the National Arbor Day Foundation in conjunction with state government

Localities must also have a tree board or department, have a community tree ordinance and spend resident on community forestry programs.

Arlington County, Va., which has received a Tree City USA award 24 years in a row, is the only U longer streak than Prince George’s, according to the National Arbor Day Foundation.

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