

Community Celebrates Arbor Day in Rumson

BY LORI DRAZ



For the past 29 years, the Borough of Rumson has achieved Tree City USA status, a true accomplishment anywhere in the country. The Tree City USA program is administered by the Arbor Day Foundation and US Forest Service to recognize communities across the country that have made a commitment to manage and expand their public trees.

The love of trees begins early in Rumson with an annual Arbor Day celebration where youngsters enjoy lectures and plant trees, do crafts about trees along with bringing home a seedling to plant themselves.

But this year was different. Arbor Day almost didn't happen - until Brooke Huff, a kindergarten teacher at Deane Porter School, contacted Shade Tree Commission Chairman Stephen Barrett about hosting the event virtually.

Barrett has always been grateful to the community for its dedication to the trees, and Arbor Day event is one of his favorite events of the year.

"I didn't have high hopes for Arbor Day this year, but it ended up being one of the best ones yet," Barrett shared. "I give Brooke so much credit for making this event happen, and seeing the students' crafts at the end made it all worthwhile!"

In New Jersey, Arbor Day is celebrated on the last Friday in April. This year, students were attending school virtually. Huff asked the Shade Tree Commission to provide a brief video and it took off. The session began with viewing a video about the importance of trees. The day's lesson plan also included Arbor Day readings, math problem solving and a special tree-related craft that provided the students with hours of fun and education.

"I believe that, like children, trees grow larger and stronger each year," Huff said. "I always use the book 'The Giving Tree' as a point of reference. It says, 'And the boy loved the tree.... And she loved a little boy very, very much - even more than she loved herself.' Then we talk about all that trees give us (shade, food, clean air, wood, paper) and that everyone, even kids as young as kindergartners,



Brooke Huff

can give back to the trees and spread love by planting new trees, taking care of trees, being respectful to trees and recycling paper."

Continuing the tradition of dedicating a tree to each year's kindergarten class, a Kousa dogwood from Chapel Hill Nursery was planted by T. Burke Honnold Landscaping outside the kindergarten wing at Deane Porter.

The Kousa dogwood, also known as a Japanese or Chinese dogwood, is an excellent ornamental tree and makes visual contributions year-round. In spring, it produces star-like blooms and in summer, layered leaves provide shade and beauty. In autumn, it offers spectacular bright red fall color and in winter, its jigsaw puzzle-like bark is on display. The Kousa dogwood makes a great addition to any home's landscape.

For more information on the Shade Tree Commission, visit RumsonNJ.gov/STC.

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