

AMBASSADORS OF CHANGE

Plant for the Planet springs up in Clark County

story by jessica swanson

photo courtesy of columbia springs

Plant for the Planet is an international organization that empowers kids ages 8 to 14 and beyond to teach others about solutions for climate change using real science and tree planting. The first Plant for the Planet Academy in Clark County was organized by Columbia Springs in January. The event hosted nearly 30 kids for the day-long conference. There are three major components to an Academy event – scientific learning about climate change, learning to plant a tree and practicing talk-

ing about the science and teaching others to plant. The kids planted several Douglas firs at Columbia Springs on a new restoration site that is a former cattle graze.

From the get-go, the kids are part of something big: “It’s the first major plant we’ve had out there in a couple of years,” said Education Coordinator Jenna Kallestad.

All the students signed up independently, and most of them were exposed to the program through Columbia Springs’ camps and other programs. They will be encouraged to use their knowledge in the community, and Columbia Springs will provide opportunities to work on restoration

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projects throughout the year at their Stewardship Saturday events. The students aren’t required to use their training, but the potential is great, said Kallestad. Plant for the Planet ambassadors from Seattle have traveled to Olympia to talk to legislators, and some representatives even attended the recent Paris Climate Change Summit.

Munich-based Plant for the Planet describes itself as an ‘organization led by children for children. More than 100,000 children are involved, and more than 30,000 (as of June 2014) are considered Ambassadors for Climate Justice. The program fits perfectly into Columbia Springs’ educational framework.

“For Columbia Springs, the biggest thing we are excited about is that this is very student driven,” said Kallestad. “They are standing up for themselves – we are just offering a space for them to take action. We are excited for them.

“If there is an interest from students we will host more academies. We are hoping students will find out it’s a resource and keep going,” she said. “It’s something that gets me really emotional – seeing fourth, fifth and sixth graders with passion and hope – we can learn a lot from them, that’s for sure.” **NE**



Fourth grader Annika Anitok hugs her tree to help loosen up the roots before planting at Columbia Springs.