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Officials open Nutley outdoor classroom



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Nutley Educational Foundation President Lorraine Kucinski dedicates Yanticaw Park's outdoor classroom with Nutley Superintendent Julie Glazer, Essex County Executive Joseph DiVencenzo and other officials.

BY HASIME KUKAJ

STAFF WRITER | NUTLEY SUN

Nutley's first outdoor classroom, which will be used for K-12th grade students, was unveiled Monday in Yanticaw Park.

State, county and local officials gathered for a ribbon cutting in the Essex County park. The Nutley High School Jazz Lab, the Walker Middle School choir and the Chamber Singers performed at the afternoon celebration.

The project comprises a partnership between Essex County, the Passaic Valley Sewage Commission and the Nutley Educational Foundation.

Overgrown brush was cleared, with new landscaping and trees added for the classroom and amphitheater area. Three tiers of seating are about 30 feet wide and built into the natural slope of the park. It seats up to 30 students near the banks of the Third River.

The podium was created from reclaimed wood.

Ground was broken in July. On Monday, student artwork surrounded the classroom.



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Nutley Board of Education President Charles Kucinski and Vice President Daniel Carnicella admire the newly dedicated outdoor classroom.

"What we have is what you see here," NEF President Lorraine Kucinski said. "It's a tremendous addition not only for the schools but to our community in Nutley. We greatly appreciate everyone coming together to get this done."

She was joined by her husband Charlie, the Nutley Board of Education's president, as well as Vice President Daniel Carnicella and board member Fred Scalera.

"We are so fortunate and so very grateful to be able to have another opportunity for the very talented students, some of who we see today, to be able to participate in a true living learning center," Superintendent Julie Glazer said. The classroom is "an opportunity to become separate from the four walls of the classroom, and to extend learning beyond what might be a traditional school day."

Glazer praised the NEF for supporting its cutting-edge efforts and thinking out of the box for the students.

Essex County freeholders Cynthia Toro and Patricia Sebold also addressed the crowd.

"I am just in awe when I see the amphitheater over there. I hear before that it was overgrown with bushes and trees," Toro said.

Sebold, a former 30-year educator in West Orange, said that education was important to her. "I'm very appreciative of PVSC putting so much work into making this a reality," she said.

PVSC Chairman Thomas Tucci, a Nutley resident, said that he was happy to participate in the project.

"This is government at its finest. This is what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to deliver for the people," Tucci said. "The more educated we are, the better we are."

Tucci said that the PVSC represents about 48 municipalities and is probably the fifth largest such commission in the country.

"Now, PVSC is not in the shadow; it's out in the open. People can actually see work that's being done," Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-28th) said. "This is going to be a living representation of what we've done for the children of Nutley, and hopefully other communities can participate in such a project."

"I think our children need to have a little diversion from their Facebook accounts, their emails, from their Twitter. They've got to see nature, out there breathing the air, talking, having human exchange with other kids" Caputo added.

Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver highlighted the Nutley school district's high-achieving students and its rate of college attendance.

County Executive DiVincenzo called his former hometown of Nutley a special town. "This is a beautiful park to have educational classes out here."

Aside from Nutley, there are outdoor classrooms in Bloomfield, Kearny and Paterson, officials stated.

Idea

As the Sun previously reported, Nutley science teachers presented the idea to the NEF and PVSC, and as a result, gained Essex County's permission to use the space.

District Science Coordinator Kent Bania, as well as Walker Middle School science teacher Lynn Zazzali and its principal Tracy Egan, were recognized for spearheading the idea.

Zazzali said that the idea came about in June 2014, when the PVSC came to the middle school as part of an outreach program.

During the summer, NEF presented a check to the Nutley Board of Education for about \$3,600 to pay for the project.

The Essex County Park System was created in 1895 and is the first county park system established in the United States. The system consists of more than 6,000 acres and has 22 parks, five reservations, an environmental center, a zoo, the Treetop Adventure Course, ice skating rink, roller skating rink, three public golf courses, golf driving range, two miniature golf courses, three off-leash dog facilities, a castle and the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens.

Land for Yanticaw Park in Nutley was acquired between 1911 and 1914. At 28.75 acres, it is Essex County's 11th largest park.

Email: kukaj@northjersey.com