

Smith River students conduct ground blessing for Soccer Field on Earth Day

May 8, 2024



One has to recognize and admire the tenacity and drive of a large and ever-growing group of Smith River School students, staff and volunteers who hope to rehabilitate the school's soccer field.

These 6th, 7th and 8th graders are bound and determined on seeing this project come to fruition...and apparently, so does the community.

Under the direction of Certificated Staff / Advisor Marcus Endert, these entrepreneurial kids have been meeting regularly with the Del Norte Unified District (DNUSD) for the past few months in seeking approval to proceed and funding to rehabilitate the soccer field and transition the grassy area for multi-purpose use.

As is this case, money is in short supply and the outlook for funding is bleak. The State budget is in serious multi-billion dollar deficit status.

The field is festooned with gopher holes; minor ankle injuries are common place. Nonetheless, the kids are moving forward with every molecule of optimism and energy. You gotta love it.

Last Friday afternoon, the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation delivered a Ground Blessing on the soccer field as the first step on moving forward on this ambitious project. On hand, among many were DNUSD Trustee Abby Crist and Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, Dr. Tom Kissinger. Also recognized at the ground blessing were Del Norte Farm Council representatives, Linda Crockett and Rob Miller, True North Project

Coordinator Andromeda Lopez, Garrett Campbell, TDN Elder advocate, Emily Reed, TDN Director of Administrative Service and Smith River School alumna, Smith River Student Council and Principal Nicole Cochran and Smith River students Dylan Walkley, President, Serenity Endert, Vice President, Carter Larson, Treasurer, Lilieana Perez-Leon, Secretary, Aiden Moran-Turner, Activities Director, Toby Endert, Historian, Class Representatives Aaron Herrera, Augustus Bieber and Kaitlyn Lopez. The ground blessing was delivered by the Tolowa Dee-ni' by Garrett Campbell on the Earth Sharing Day which preceded cake and lemonade refreshments.

The Trustees asked three questions of Teacher Mr. Endert.:

- Who are the volunteers dedicated to helping see this project to finish?
- Who controls the money and materials helping to fund this project?
- Is there a licensed architect with plans working with the group?

DNUSD Superintendent Jeff Harris calls the soccer field effort a “pilot project,” and was very supportive of the soccer field improvements. Other trustees have stated both Crescent Elk and Redwood schools also have infrastructure needs.

Where is the funding coming from? Endert says about \$65,000 is needed for materials alone. An estimate on labor costs was not revealed. According to advisor Endert, most of the labor will be performed by volunteers under the direction of DNUSD Maintenance.

The four major community partners are:

- Del Norte County Farm Bureau
- Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation
- True North/ Smith River Elementary School Local Organizing Committee
- Klamath Promise Initiative. And the list of volunteers continues to grow.

The next stop for the students is meeting with the District Engineer who will share his skill-set in organizing this project, discussing the plan for gopher wiring under the turf. Additional meetings are planned with Assistant Superintendent for Business Services Jeff Napier, Assistant Superintendent Gregory Bowen for Fiscal Services, Director of Maintenance Joshua McCubbin and Superintendent Harris.

The road to a new soccer field has a few bumps along the way but with community support, the journey may be a successful one.