

# Grants benefit RMS outdoor garden site

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At Ruppenthal Middle School's Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site, recent grants have enabled remodeling of the OWLS waterway, and will fund the purchase of solar-powered electrical lighting for the OWLS walkway.

The garden is maintained, as a learning project, by RMS seventh grade science students led by teachers Jim Balthazor and Angie Peeler.

In May 2010, Balthazor received a grant from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism to help fund the remodeling of the RMS OWLS garden's waterway. This KDWP grant provided \$1,000, which Balthazor matched with an additional \$1,000. The matching funds were acquired from revenue generated by the RMS sports concession stand. As a result, \$2,000 became available to remodel the OWLS waterway.

Additionally, Jack Driscoll donated limestone for this remodeling project, and Gary Praytor donated sand.

The remodeling was performed during all of the 2010-2011 school year and continued until this past Nov. 1, when the project was completed.

Balthazor said the old waterway at the OWLS garden was completely removed, including the waterway's bed liner and its pedestrian bridge.

Some new excavation work was then performed. Afterward, a layer of sand was laid down in the empty waterway channel, and a new waterproof liner was laid down on top of the sand. Then, a layer of coarse gravel, salvaged from the old waterway project, was piled on top of the liner. Larger pieces of river rock were then

placed on top of the gravel layer.

The newly remodeled waterway is intended to show how geologic erosion in mountains produces a lot of the sand, gravel, and rocks which are carried by rivers into the Russell County area.

The project's water consumption is minimal. Balthazor said the bed is designed to contain about 200 gallons of water. During the current winter season, the evaporation rate from the waterway is only about 20 gallons per week.

Balthazor, discussing the process of acquiring money for the new OWLS walkway lighting, said he recently received \$500 from the local Peggy Taylor Memorial Fund. Balthazor used this \$500 as a match for a grant through the Russell County Area Community Foundation. Through the foundation, an additional \$700 was provided.

Furthermore, Balthazor said the OWLS garden's lighting project also will receive \$300 funded by revenue from sales by Ruppenthal Middle School's sports concession stand. As a result, a

total of \$1,500 is available for buying the solar-powered lighting fixtures.

According to Balthazor, a set of about 20 lights will be purchased along with a like number of three-foot-high support posts.

Next spring, Ruppenthal Middle School's seventh grade science students will install these post lights along both sides of the OWLS garden's walkway.

Balthazor plans for these new walkway lights to provide both illumination and beauty to the garden. He said he would like the general Russell community to come and enjoy the OWLS garden, which is, in effect, a small park.

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