

# Connecting with the good earth...

**By Saranac Hale Spencer**  
VOORHEESVILLE — Joy, compounded by anticipation, filled the garden behind the elementary school before anything had sprouted.

owner of Elemental Landscapes, donated his time working on the project.

At the garden's official opening last Wednesday, on Earth Day, fifth-grader Tommy Gallager

the school's spirit and garden committees to be among three names on which students could vote. The Blackbird is Voorheesville's mascot.

As students left the garden on

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A handful of third-graders burst through the picket gate of the new garden, all aflutter and with instructions to examine the contents of old soda bottles that they had filled with dirt and different types of debris — pieces of plastic, tin foil, and banana peels — to see what kinds of things biodegrade.

Later that afternoon, Laura Bye's lesson plan included dissecting daffodils, which she brings in from her yard, she said. Next year, students will be able to go to the garden to clip their own flowers to dissect, she said, concluding, “There would be that connection of where it came from.”

That is one of the many messages that parent Bri McAlevey, who has been instrumental in the project, hopes the garden will convey. “A lot of kids don't have a connection to their food,” she said this week. Looking after a garden will teach children about the root of their food and good land stewardship, she said.

The committee that formed earlier this school year would like to funnel ingredients from the garden into the cafeteria, she said, as well as contributing to the food pantry at St. Matthew's Church.

“It really came from... this idea that we should be eating local,” McAlevey said, and caring for land. She mentioned the idea to Parent Teacher Association president Jennifer Hampston, McAlevey said, and it grew.

They raised nearly \$12,000, she said, some of which hasn't yet been spent. The PTA gave \$3,000, the Voorheesville Community and School Foundation gave \$3,000, the Kiwanis gave \$750, and the rest came from local businesses and family contributions. McAlevey, who called it an “ubergarden,” guessed that it's a \$30,000 project, given the pathways, fencing, and water spigot, but Jerry Parmenter,

clipped the ribbon with a pair of giant garden shears. He earned the honor by coming up with the garden's name, Blackbird Paradise, which was chosen by

Wednesday, McAlevey said, each was given a seed packet. “We're trying to spread the idea of growing food,” she said. “Taking care of land.”



The Enterprise — Saranac Hale Spencer  
***Pulling on a glove, Hannah Danz, next to Dominick Cardona, gets ready to do work in the new garden at Voorheesville's elementary school.***