

Whiting wins award for helping students plant native species

With help from BP's Whiting Refinery, students created a garden of native prairie plants outside the Hammond Academy of Science and Technology, efforts that have been recognized with "Bringing Nature Home" awards from the Friends of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

Given to gardeners and organizations that help restore native ecosystems in Northwest Indiana, the awards were presented at a community luncheon Nov. 16 in Valparaiso. The students received an award, and BP shared another award with the Wildlife Habitat Council, a nonprofit coalition of corporations and conservation groups dedicated to restoring wildlife habitat. BP granted funds and resources to develop classroom instruction where biologists from the council and BP employees taught students about the value of native environments and how to design and build a native garden.

The Hammond Academy of Science and Technology is a charter school for grades six through nine. During its first school year, 2010 - 2011, BP Whiting

provided \$40,000 to support the native garden project, and refinery employees were on hand to help students with the



planting. The garden is a sample of the colorful grasses, flowers and plants that once blanketed the region – including purple prairie clover, little bluestem, Indian grass, prairie smoke and stiff goldenrod. Native trees, white oak and American redbud, were also planted outside the school.

The "Bringing Nature Home" award also recognizes BP for donating \$18,000 and its employees for volunteering last summer to create a park of native plants outside Nathan

Hale Elementary in downtown Whiting.

"We wanted to make an aesthetic improvement to the Whiting community, while creating a permanent outdoor learning environment for the students, and returning native plants to the region," said Brad Etlin, BP's former Director of Government and Public Affairs for the Whiting Refinery and now part of BP's U.S. Internal Communications Group.

About 60 employees, retirees and friends from across the country volunteered for the BP Classic, a community-service event held every summer in a different location. The 2012 project to build the native park at the Nathan Hale school was a joint effort of the BP Whiting Refinery, the Wildlife Habitat Council and the Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

BP offered to build the park on open space next to the school. Along with designing and landscaping the park and planting the native flora, volunteers also installed signs that identify and explain the plants. The volunteers also planted native species at the entrance to the refinery's visitor center. ■

