

LC/R-3: Linda Schmitt Holiday Decoration Award

Submitted by: Harbor Island Garden Club

Brief summary and objectives:

Harbor Island Garden Club, in conjunction with the Wrightsville Beach Elementary School 5th Grade Rooty Rascals Junior Gardeners Club, worked with the marine and environmental science teacher Julie Baggett on a “Trash to Treasures” project. Over a series of meetings together students embarked on an educational journey with club members which resulted in a spectacular holiday feature to be enjoyed and celebrated by the entire Wrightsville Beach community.

The project kicked off with presentations led by club members and marine science staff for the 5th graders teaching the life cycle of trash. Students were stunned by the expansive time to decompose our everyday waste... from plastic bottles to tin cans. Please refer to the illustration for the mind-blowing statistics that fueled the minds and hearts of our Junior Gardeners.

Empowered with this new awareness and respect for waste, the students then took to the school grounds and neighborhood for a litter sweep. Situated on a small island, Wrightsville Beach Elementary and the surrounding area’s litter is susceptible to running into the ocean and waterways which surround us on all sides, threatening marine life. With this in mind the students eagerly collected trash, then cleaned the waste to prepare it for a beautiful re-purposed life: dazzling ornaments to decorate a community Christmas tree.

- Plastic bottles: 70-450 years
- Plastic bag: 500-1000 years
- Tin can: around 50 years
- Leather shoes: 25-40 years
- Thread: 3-4 months
- Cotton: 1-5 months
- Rope: 3-14 months
- Cigarette: 1-12 years
- Milk packet (tetra) covers and drink packets: 5 years
- Nylon clothes: 30-40 years
- Sanitary napkins & children diapers: 500-800 years
- Glass bottles: 1,000,000 years
- Hairspray bottle: 200-500 years
- Fishing line: 600 years.
- Glass bottle; 1-2 million years
- Aluminum can: 200 years

Photos Below: Rooty Rascal Gardeners collecting trash during the litter sweep




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Using minimal embellishments the young artist transformed trash and recyclables into creative, meaningful symbols demonstrating their appreciation of their environment. This will bring joy and beauty to those who visit the tree located at the Wrightsville Beach Museum Bordeaux Cottage, which host various holiday events for the town. The students can invite their families to visit the tree and bear witness to their powerful stake in generating environmental awareness in their community.



Trash  Treasure



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Involvement of club members and other organizations:

The HIGC Rooty Rascal leaders, along with the Wrightsville Beach marine and environmental science teacher were excited to be reunited with students (after a Covid-19 hiatus last year) to work on this project. Other collaborators to note include staff and volunteers from the Wrightsville Beach historical society.

Project expenses and means of funding:

The funding for this project is from the Harbor Island Garden Club budget of money designated for the Rooty Rascals Junior Gardeners Club.

Continuing involvement, follow-up, maintenance:

It is hoped that we are establishing a tradition for future 5th graders to look forward to as they participate in litter sweeps, ornament creation and tree decoration- spreading educational cheer for years to come.

Attach or insert photos, digital photos:

See the following pages for additional photographs.

