

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

IN HONOR OF “EARTH DAY 2002,” SIX “HARD-HIT” SCHOOLS AT GROUND ZERO RECEIVE THOUSANDS OF PLANTS TO CLEAN THE AIR AND EASE TENSIONS

New York, NY, April 8, 2002 - SCHOOL #1 - Nearly a month after the attacks on the World Trade Center, students returning to Stuyvesant High School noticed an unpleasant smell in the air. Stuyvesant, located just a few blocks away from Ground Zero, was directly in line with winds carrying smoke, pollutants, and pungent odors from the still smoldering fires at the site of the September 11 attacks.

Concerned about air quality at the 97-year-old school, Stuyvesant officials came across Dr. Bill Wolverton’s NASA research verifying that plants can clean the air. After contacting a Long Island wholesale greenhouse, Eric Kiel of Otto Kiel Florists, for help, the school became the lucky recipient of 1,000 donated plants.

In the wake of the tragic events of September 11, the donated plants have had a profound effect on the students at Stuyvesant High School. Serving as more than just “air purifiers,” the plants have provided Stuyvesant students with a source of comfort and inspiration as they strive to forge ahead in the post-attack world.

A student essay contest, sponsored by *Plants at Work*, has given Stuyvesant students a platform for sharing their stories about how plants have made a difference in the quality of their lives in the shadow of the terrorist attacks. Cash prizes were awarded to the top three essays submitted. The winning essay writer, Leah Rabinowitz, has since read her essay on national radio programs such as NPR's *Living On Earth* show.

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Five additional schools, some even closer to Ground Zero, reopened in March and were also beneficiaries of plant donations

Thousands more plants were soon shipped to these schools, including PS89, IS89, PS234, PS150 (Tribeca Learning Center) and the High School of Economics and Finance. PS89 and IS89 are both located in the same high rise. Pre-K, elementary and middle school students who live in the Ground Zero area attend the schools. Many of these students were not only displaced from their schools after the attacks, but their homes as well.

In some schools air vents had to be closed because they could not adequately filter the outside air. As a consequence, students were breathing unhealthy, re-circulated air. At Stuyvesant High School, the plants were used to help reduce carbon dioxide levels that rose to unhealthy levels when the vents were closed.

All of these schools have reported vast improvements in both the IAQ (indoor air quality) and the mood of the students since the arrival of the plants.

The sustainable aspect of plants as air purifiers was of critical importance for these particular schools. In addition to the fumes generated by trucks outside waiting to load and unload World Trade Center debris, another concern was pollution from the debris that is dumped into mammoth barges in the Hudson River immediately adjacent to Stuyvesant High School and one block from PS89 and IS89.

The High School of Economics and Finance is located just one block from the former World Trade Center site, and all of the cafeteria windows overlook Ground Zero. Their interior plants were installed in specially constructed planter boxes by Quennell Rothschild Associates to sit on the windowsills, providing a visual barrier to the scene of the attack. Air quality remains an issue at this school as the opening was delayed by several weeks due to the discovery of additional pollutants.

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The plants for all six of the schools were donated and shipped free of charge.

The successful organization, implementation and maintenance of a project of this scale required help and selfless commitment from hundreds of volunteers as well as donations from several green industries. Following is an abbreviated list that includes the major organizers who saw this large project through to completion.

- Chet Peckett of Pecketts Inc. (Pecketts@aol.com)
- Eric Kiel of Otto Kiel Florists (Ebkeil@aol.com)
- *Plants at Work* sponsor Will Creed, Owner of Horticultural Help (wcreed@HorticulturalHelp.com)
- Gail Rink of Flori-Design Nursery (gailfloridesign@aol.com) - central Florida coordinator
- Patty Rabin of Living Color Nursery (lcnpatty@yahoo.com) - South Florida coordinator
- Dicks Trucking (plants@etltransportation.com) and TPC, Tropical Plant Carriers (tammy.skipper@go-TPC.com) - donated all shipping for the plants

Plants at Work is a national information campaign working to inform professionals and the public about the important benefits of interior plants.

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