



Destinee Cortijo, 12, (left) of West Point, seals a fresh graft with special yellow wax to protect it from moisture. Alexis Johnston, 10, (above) of West Point, tapes a freshly-grafted Nijiseitki Asian pear tree.

## Farm Project gives youngsters studies in grafting, horticulture

Students from Jim Casey's West Point Elementary fifth- and sixth-grade class participated in tree grafting on February 23 as part of the school's ongoing Farm Project, a collaboration with District 2 Supervisor Steve Wilensky and his Humbug Creek Farm in Glencoe, where garden spaces are allocated for the students.

The Farm Project, in its sixth year, teaches students the processes of farming and crop production, germination, seed testing, soil analysis, moth pheromone testing and pest identification, including the habits of gophers and methods of discouraging them.

A key focus of their efforts is to establish heirloom trees and plants of

particular value in antiquity and rarity. This grafting activity included such rare apple varieties as Arkansas Black, Buckingham and Hauer Pippin, as well as Seuri and Nijiseiki Asian pears.

The Buckingham apple, popularly cultivated in the United States during the 1700s, is extremely rare today, according to Wilensky.

"There are only a handful of Buckingham apple trees in the state and no more than two in this area," said Wilensky. "Our goal today is to graft 20 Buckinghams, as well as others."

Because the growing season overlaps school years, one class of Farm Project students plants the garden each year and the following class harvests. They grow a wide variety of entirely organic plants, including onions, heirloom tomatoes, artichokes, strawberries, squash, pumpkins, corn, potatoes, cucumbers, greens (Asian and European) and garlic. The students sell their bounty and the project averages between \$200.00 and

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Trenton Breckenridge, 11, of West Point, and Steve Wilensky (right) use a rare, hand-made Italian grafting tool for cutting tree grafts. West Point Elementary kindergartners (above) form an energetic raking brigade on tree-rafting day.

## Kids give trees a fresh cut

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\$400.00 in sales each year from their efforts.

Nutrition is also a focus of the Farm Project. "When we're harvesting, kids take an interest in making things," said Wilensky. "We've had some revelations as to where food comes from. For instance, kids harvest fruit and make it into what they might eat for lunch. Last year we had some spectacular strawberry pie."

The students also play an active role in Humbug Farm's annual apple harvest and cider press operation. During the apple harvest, each class breaks up into work groups and compete in a "cider press challenge" to see how much apple juice they can press in an hour.

"The kids are involved in the entire apple-pressing process," said Wilensky. "They organize the apple-picking, assembly line, juicing and bottling."



### EMPLOYMENT

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