

# MAKING ROOM

## • LOVE RAPID CITY REDESIGNS ELEMENTARY ROOMS



When a classroom is housed in an annex, teachers might feel a little disconnected from their schools – quite literally. To help make the Black Hawk Elementary annexes feel a little more like a home, Love Rapid City, shared the love by redesigning the rooms.

Love Rapid City, which is a local group out of Fountain Springs Church, works across the community providing service to people and projects.

Every so often, the group contacts principals with one simple question, “How can we help?”

After a brainstorming session, Black Hawk had the perfect opportunity for them. The student population at Black Hawk has continued to grow and because of that, three annexes now house fifth grade classrooms. It was decided these annexes were a great place to add a little color and life.

“When people think about annexes, they often think of them as dark places,” Black Hawk Elementary Principal Holly Yamada said.

“We wanted to change that and make them feel more a part of the building.”

With guidance from fifth grade teachers, the group came in during the month of June ready to work. New paint colors were chosen for the walls, new curtains were hung, and old lockers were taken out and replaced with functional storage. Wooden cupboard doors were also replaced with whiteboards to make them serve a double purpose of storage and writing space.

Each room now also features a “reading corner” with bag chairs and bookcases filled with books and supplies. All materials used in the redesign were donated by Love Rapid City.

“Love Rapid City really wanted to come in and do something to make their day a little brighter, to show their appreciation for our teaching staff and to the work they do with our students on a daily basis,” Yamada said.

This is not the first time Love Rapid City has helped give Black Hawk Elementary, and other RCAS schools, a bit of a facelift. The group previously donated supplies and time to re-paint Black Hawk classrooms and also donated family-style dining table and a nice seating area for teachers to take a deep breath in the midst of a busy day.

“It’s definitely been a morale booster,” said Yamada. “You can’t imagine what a fresh count of paint can do for a room to make them cheerier and better suited for the learning environment.”

Katy Kinnan of Love Rapid City said helping the school is truly a win-win situation for Black Hawk and Love Rapid City alike.

“We just wanted to be a tiny part of the great things that happen at Black Hawk every day,” said Kinnan. “We have seen how passionate those teachers are and we enjoy doing anything we can do to lighten the load.”

When students were asked how they felt about their new classrooms, resounding cheers and one word followed: “Awesome!”

# PINEDALE TAKES LEARNING OUTDOORS

Another classroom was recently added to Pinedale Elementary.

Only it's not indoors and doesn't feature whiteboards, desks, or computers. Pinedale has transformed its courtyard into an Outdoor Classroom and will host an Open House on Sept. 23 from 3:30-6 p.m. for parents and the community to come see what all the fuss is about.

Malinda Chappell, Pinedale second grade teacher, and according to Principal Rick Owen "the brains behind the courtyard", said the inspiration came from the National Wildlife Federation's program called Schoolyard Habitats.

Pinedale teachers wanted a place where children could authentically apply the knowledge from the classroom and take it outside in a real-world setting. Luckily for them, with this new outdoor classroom, they won't have to go very far.

Traveling through the courtyard there are three of South Dakota's primary habitats: prairie-meadow, Black Hills Forest, and the Badlands. Each location is filled with plants native to the area and helps to meet the needs of wildlife through all seasons. There is a large, covered pergola filled with mushroom stools and benches for students to meet and discuss the discoveries of the day.

A weather station sits centered in the courtyard where students can collect and record weather data or identify the cloud formations in the sky. There is also a large greenhouse and raised vegetable beds for every grade level to grow their own produce.

"Life-long, healthy eating habits will be established as children discover new favorites that they grow and harvest themselves," said Chappell.

Getting students outside and literally in the dirt is something Chappell and other Pinedale staff wanted to accomplish. Because many children might live sedentary, videogame-filled lives, Chappell and others wanted to teach the importance of getting outside and plant the seed of outside curiosity.



"Non-motivated, disengaged students have become far more common in the classroom over the last few years," said Chappell.

"But, when they are outside, in the dirt, experiencing life rather than just hearing about it, they are not only engaged but inspired to want to learn more."

The Outdoor Classroom isn't quite done yet and there are still future plans for expansion. It's the hope that it will soon feature a water catchment system, a vermicomposting (composting with worms) station, and others.

Getting families involved is also important, said Owen, which is why they are hosting the Open House for parents to have the opportunity to see it and continue the learning and curiosity at home.

"In the future our courtyard will not only educate children of all ages but also their families," said Chappell. "We believe the connections to the environment, ideas of conservation, and the desire to get out, learn and explore will become family values as well."

Sponsors that made this Outdoor Classroom possible:

- Louise Englestad –master gardener and designer of all the habitats
- Plantsmyth- Allen Leighton
- Knechts- Carl Hellekson
- Modern Woodmen- Ken Beer
- Sherwin Williams – Greg Bruce
- Made for Shade – Lycia Scott
- Rapid City Public School Foundation- McKee Ford, MAC construction
- Izaak Walton League of America – Mark Boddicker
- Civil Discourse – Christy Heacock
- 1+1 Program- First Interstate Bank, News Center 1
- Master Gardeners – Mary Roduner
- Rapid City Garden Club – Cathy Robeson
- Tony Dean Foundation- SD Parks and Wildlife Foundation
- Fountain Springs Community Church- Katie Kinnan
- Pheasants Forever – Darrell Kjerstad
- Rapid City Landfill - Beth Anne Ferley
- Nielsen Royal Construction - Shawn Nielsen
- Dream Design International - Hani Shafai
- Kristal Montgomery, Hope Christofferson – muralists
- Jake Benson – carpenter
- Nolan Fredericks – Eagle Scout Project
- Children, families and staff of Pinedale Elementary – raising funds and many hours of labor planting and maintaining the habitats.

To learn more about the Outdoor Classroom, call Pinedale Elementary at 394-1805.