

Earth Day: Celebrate CommUNITY

The Earth Day: Celebrate CommUNITY originated from a 5-year old named Tristan and his love of recycling, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and the natural world. With help from his mother, pre-K teacher and incredible community partners, we built relationships with key corporate and private partners launching our first event with less than 3-months of planning. The inaugural was April 22, 2013



(Earth Day) at Veteran's Park serving over 800 students, Pre-K- 2, from 8 participating Tulsa public schools. Since its inception, the event has united a diverse community of parents, teachers, organizations and businesses to plan annual events that inform, educate and energize the community. STEM-based activities are used to deliver important messages about healthy communities and how people interact with their environment while helping to insure its well-being. Examples of this include: ways to decrease the carbon footprint, electric and solar cars, wind-powered turbines, recycling songs, identifying endangered animals, how to fish, geological digs, micro-credit banks and saving, bike-propelled smoothies, hydroponic displays, monarch gardens, composting for chickens, clean water exhibits, recycled sound garden, caring for the land in the context of farming, livestock and poultry, and maintaining a healthy, active lifestyle.

The 2017 event culminated at a critical time for Tulsa Public Schools to strengthen the bonds between corporate educational partners and individual schools. This event is the only one of its kind targeted to elementary students in specific schools in geographical underserved regions. Our 2017 event marked its fourth year of which the last two were held on the University of Tulsa campus. This inspired young students by interacting with university student volunteers – creating a positive first memory of “this is a place that I belong and enjoy learning at.”

There are both objective and subjective data indicating successful learning happens at the event. There were reports from teachers about students wanting to start a “Green



team” and recycle in their school, making comments about lessons learned and how they would bring this learning home, and simply singing recycle songs they learned. Learning questions were submitted by many of the booths pertaining to the important lesson from each activity. These were delivered to teachers and parent volunteers prior to the event, so they could go over the questions with the students then search for the answers at the booths. Teachers reported that students were excited to share what they learned; from the schools that have reported feedback to date, over 75% of students successfully completed follow-up questionnaires.

Further evidence of success: The event was awarded 2016 winner of Keep Oklahoma Beautiful (KOB) in the “K-12 Education” category. It was also awarded “Best of the Environmental Best”, a prestigious award in being recognized as the winner across all 13 KOB award categories. The 2017 celebration hosted over 2000 students from 12 schools and included many “veteran” second graders who “graduated” from their fourth year at the event!!!



This year Secretary of State, Chuck Hoskin and Tommy Wildcat led the opening ceremony welcoming the Cherokee Nation and celebrating OK culture.

Currently, this event is organized by a grassroots collection of enthusiastic individuals and partners led by co-founder, Katherine Anderson. Key partners are: Sustainable Tulsa, Tulsa Regional STEM Alliance, and The University of Tulsa. The current plan is to found *Earth Day Oklahoma, Inc.* (EDOK), a 501(c)3 nonprofit to increase education and awareness on the importance of environment, sustainability, encouraging outdoor interest and STEM. Longer term, EDOK aims to increase STEM-related career interest with the potential to build a strong economic impact in Oklahoma for the future.

Logistically, another factor to help sustain the event, was the move to The University of Tulsa, which has embraced the event and helped make it a success in 2017. The Sustainability Committee helped Dr. Anderson organize and run the event with a Student Volunteer Service Leader. Fortunately, we found a freshman who wanted the position for 2016 and was equally involved and helpful for the 2017 event. She was active in finding and organizing TU student volunteers. She intends to serve in this role for the next two years and help find a replacement upon graduation.

There were over 50 partners for the event. Some were educational partners of specific schools that helped plan booth activities with the school (e.g., CTCA and Renewable Solutions). Others “manned” their own booths (e.g., Covanta, Loughridge, and Zebco). More details about all the booths in the 2017 event, along with the partner and theme of the booths is found in the supplemental document, ED 2017-Booklet.