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Cub Scouts help plant the future

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VALPARAISO | Cub Scout Pack 902 dug into the ground Saturday and left a legacy for generations to come.

It was all part of a volunteer tree planting workday at Meadowbrook Conservation Center and Nature Preserve, hosted by the Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

About 15 Scouts in first through fifth grades gathered at the 74-acre preserve to plant red and white oak, tulip, poplar, black walnut, sugar maple and black oak trees. They also installed tubing around the trees to prevent them from being eaten by deer.

Paul Quinlan, stewardship director with the land trust, showed Scouts how to dig a 1-foot deep hole in the soil with a shovel and place the trees so that all of their roots would be covered.

While not all the trees that were planted will survive, those that do are expected to reach 80 feet tall, Quinlan said.

The day's goal was to plant between 800 and 1,000 trees out of a total of 2,000 needed to reforest the area, said Jim Erdelac, education and volunteer manager with the land trust.

Erdelac said the land trust hosts a volunteer day once a month and matches individuals and groups with projects that fit their skill sets.

Some of the projects include building boardwalks and bridges, trail maintenance, exotic species control and planting native species, he said.

Nick Vorkapich, the Pack 902 leader, said he wanted to get Scouts involved in conservation projects to teach them how to be good stewards of the environment.

"We knew about the Shirley Heinze Land Trust, and we thought this was a great opportunity to do something close to home," Vorkapich said.

Pack 902 also plans to do another conservation project and camp out at the preserve this fall, he said.

Vorkapich's son, David, 7, a first-grader at Cooks Corners Elementary School in Valparaiso, was among participating Scouts. He said the new trees would help provide more homes for animals and keep them safe.

Mitchell Tomczak, 10, a fourth-grader at Cooks Corners, said the planting was harder than he thought, but it was still fun.

"We're growing nature," he said.

Anneliesje Wiening, committee chair for Cub Scout Pack 902, said the pack hopes to develop an ongoing relationship with the Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

"In 20 years, the kids will be able to bring their kids back here and say, 'we planted these trees,'" she said.

For more information about the Shirley Heinze Land Trust and volunteer opportunities, visit www.heinzetrust.org or call (219) 242-8558.