

Leadership Fresno dives into ‘water-wise’ class project

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Leadership Fresno Class 31 hopes to draw attention to the beauty and benefits of “water-wise landscaping” with its new Woodward Park project. In a sign of these drought-stricken times, members of the current Leadership Fresno class have chosen an apt challenge for their class project: creating a xeriscaped “demonstration garden” in northeast Fresno’s Woodward Park.

In tackling the project, Leadership Fresno Class 31 hopes to draw attention to the beauty and benefits of “water-wise landscaping,” according to class member Nicholas Grim, who is the group’s fundraising chair for the garden project.

When completed later this spring, Grim said class members hope the garden will serve as “an educational and inspirational” example to the thousands of visitors who come each year to Woodward Park, the Central Valley’s largest regional park.

The class came up with the idea for the garden last August while on a retreat at Hume Lake. “We wanted to help educate people about alternative ways to deal with the drought,” said Grim, who works for United Way of Fresno County.

Located in front of the park’s Activity Center near the Friant and Fort Washington roads’ entrance, work on the 8,000-square-foot garden actually began earlier this month and is slated to be completed by May 15.

Both cash and in-kind donations are funding the garden’s estimated construction cost of about \$100,000, Grim said.

Professional landscapers and contractors, many of who have donated their time and materials, have been working on

the garden, but class members are also chipping in.

“Little by little, we’re all getting our hands dirty,” Grim said. “We want this garden to be a destination, somewhere people go to take wedding or graduation pictures or come just to hang out and enjoy the beauty of the park.”

Among the plants featured in the garden will be agave blue glow, caryopteris dark knight and cistus sunset.

Grim said signs will be posted around the garden to educate visitors about various plants and how much water they use.

The garden’s centerpiece will be a 40-foot-long tile bench made from line drawings created by children in area after-school programs.

The theme for the children’s drawing assignment, Grim said, is ‘What do you love about your city?’

Founded in 1984, Leadership Fresno is one of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce’s most prominent — and popular — programs.

Designed to create new business leaders in the community, each year, a group of Fresnans is selected to participate in the program, which begins in August with an immersive two-day retreat, followed by daylong seminars each month.

Class members are also charged with designing and carrying out a class project that will have a significant and lasting impact on the community.

Last year’s project involved the creation of a new, solar-powered ‘Welcome to Fresno’ sign near the American Avenue overpass along northbound Highway 99.

Class 30 members raised nearly \$100,000 to fund that project.

Each year’s Leadership Fresno class has a specific business sponsor. This year’s sponsor is American Ambulance.

Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin is among the more notable graduates of the chamber program, which includes monthly seminars touching on agribusiness, healthcare, criminal justice, politics, economics, education and the media.

On May 9, a Class Planting Day is scheduled so that Leadership Fresno members and their families and friends can pull on a pair of gardening gloves and pick up a shovel.

The public is also invited to participate.

“This is going to be a very colorful and beautiful garden,” Grim promised. “It’s going to be a lot more than just cactus and dirt.”

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