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YMCA playground asphalt given a nutrition mission

By Jim Smith, Woodland Daily Democrat

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A pair of 13-year-old boys who are members of local 4-H groups, supported by parents and volunteers, brought education and a bit of color to the YMCA Woodland Day Care Center on Lemen Avenue in Woodland last weekend.

Noah Ross, a member of Golden Valley 4-H in Davis and Ethan Horowitz, of West Plainfield 4-H, came up with the idea of painting portions of the concrete and asphalt playground to be more educational as well as “nutritious.”

With the aid of preschool parents, volunteers and UC CalFresh Nutrition Education Program, areas near a school garden were painted to represent what was being grown. For example, a strawberry patch in the garden was reflected with painted strawberries on a concrete patio adjacent to the garden. Other artwork represented tomatoes, carrots, zucchini and radishes, according to Kim Pardo, bilingual community education specialist.

Elsewhere, on the playground portion of the preschool, buckets of white, yellow, blue, black, brown, purple, orange, red and green paint, were used to provide hopscotch patterns and other

games, along with letters of the alphabet.

On Saturday, Ross said that he’d been working with Horowitz on the project for about a month.

“Basically, we’re painting this entire space for the YMCA Preschool,” Ross said while beneath an outdoor awning and next to a school garden. “This is going to help the children here learn about physical education, nutrition and also help them learn about plants and exercise basically.”

Ross showed where he had painted green footprints that can be used to help children line up when entering and leaving the building.

“We’ve also painted a bulls-eye where they can throw stuff,” Ross continued. “A lot of my 4-H group aren’t here today (Saturday) but they’ll be here on Sunday when we hope to have it finished.”

Painting pictures of vegetables, Ross said, “will help the children learn about the vegetables why they’re important to eat and how they grow.”

Pardo endorsed Ross's explanation, adding the idea behind the effort was to teach the importance of eating fruits and vegetables and engaging in active play, which needs to start in preschool. She noted that instill healthy habits early can lead the children to avoid diabetes, obesity and other diseases later in life.

“Decorating the playground with healthy living reminders brings nutrition and physical activity classroom lessons outside,” she stated.

UC CalFresh Nutrition Education Program services more than 52 CalFresh sites across Yolo County. She said the preschool has utilized its curriculum and services for the past nine years.

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