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From Front Page

Pint-Sized Gardeners Plant Butterfly-Friendly Natives

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The prospect of butterflies makes getting dirty even more fun!

Photo provided

Harris is on a list of volunteers, with the Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association, who remove swarms. Bee swarming is a natural phenomenon; bees leave their home hive because it's getting over-crowded as more nectar and pollen are stored in the hive. "Fat and happy honeybees, with no home to protect, are less likely to sting," advises the Mount Diablo Bee Keepers Association. While pollinating honey bees are generally a very good thing, they may not be a terrific combination with little helpers.

Looking to create a tasty nectar-rich environment Greg Travers, parks maintenance specialist worked with intern Lena Orlando and Merriewood's Kevin Feinstein to come up with the garden project filled with native flowering plants like monkey flower, sage, asters and mugwort that offer lots of tasty treats. Merriewood is an afterschool day care facility associated with Burton Valley Elementary School just over the hill.

Orlando carefully researched types of low maintenance native plants that will attract butterflies and mapped out the best spots for sun- and shade-loving plants that won't need much watering after they're established. She is studying horticulture at Oregon State University; although that's a long commute from Lafayette she takes her full load of classes online and anticipates graduating next summer.

Butterflies like to stay warm so three large boulders selected by Orlando, which have a bit of a natural dip in the center to hold water, were placed in the sunny center of the garden to be a natural heater.

With fresh water in the nearby creek, this particular location just across the footbridge and to the left in the community park is flanked by picnic tables and a play area for little ones; an obvious choice for optimal butterfly viewing. For now though, the hardy native plants need to grow

and actually flower to entice with the equivalent of chocolate cake for butterflies. Good thing the transformation from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly may take a while.

Ambitious bee hero Steven Harris, 23, is happy to collect swarms since he's starting a honey business. A graduate of Acalanes and former student at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo majoring in agriculture and environmental plant sciences, he had taken classes on bee keeping. When not at his part-time jobs at Whole Foods and Diablo Valley Montessori he's busy getting "Bee Friendly Honey" up and running. His five-year plan includes starting a nursery business selling plants that draw honey bees and beneficial insect plants that attract lady bugs and praying mantis that eat bad bugs.

Jack Zemsch: A Little Person with a Big Voice

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"When we've met with politicians to talk about funding for research, they'd listen to figures and facts, but the person in the room who

had the most impact was Jack," says his mother.

"If research had not been done by the time I was 7, I might be in the grave, or at least not living a very healthy life," Zemsch says.

"He is a great spokesperson because he is passionate, he has a story to tell, and he is a great example," adds his mother.

The Camino Pablo Elementary fifth grader now lives a normal life. He is in Boys Scouts, swims competitively, and was elected to the student council last year. "My goal in life is to become a leader and a spokesperson," Zemsch says. When his family went to Washington, D.C. to meet with the Delaware Senator Tom Carper and Senator Chris Coons, since his surgery was done in that state, he was one of the first to speak.

"I talked about keeping the NIH (National Institutes of Health) funded, so every association, such as the AAOS, continues to do research. Because of budget cuts, every association risks losing funding," says Zemsch. Everyone from Delaware pledged support; the vote will come soon and the family hopes that the NIH will at least continue to receive its current level of funding.

Zemsch believes that cutting resources to fundamental science is dangerous. "If they stop research they will kill a lot of people and the economy at the same time," he says. His mother understands that fundamental research is very expensive and has very little direct return on investment, but it is also the building blocks on which new cures and medications are

found, and is what makes this country a leader in the medical field.

Zemsch is also a powerful a voice at the local level. When the Moraga School District was working on its strategic plan, it interviewed Zemsch.

"I said that it would be nice to have more hands-on science in class," he says. "When we reach the end of a science chapter, the experiments are scheduled as the last part, and we rarely have the time to do it." He was also asked what his favorite class was. "I answered 'music,'" he says, "because it is the only class where I feel comfortable, even with my disability."

Moraga mobilized for Zemsch. The 'Team Jack Fund' was started by Karin Hein and Leanne Parsons. Today the fund helps send a family with a rare spinal condition to meet with MacKenzie. "They can meet with him at his hospital or at the yearly Little People of America (LPA) convention," says Zemsch's mom. LPA had its genesis with the filming of the Wizard of Oz; it was the first time that little people from all over United States got together and exchanged perspectives. They decided to continue to meet and created the LPA. Every year, patients and doctors meet there, interact and debate for two days, and patients can get a free doctor appointment.

Zemsch is waiting for the results of the budgetary vote. On the line is cutting-edge research on the gene that causes his condition. "If they find a cure for my disease," says Zemsch, "they can find a cure for other diseases related to that same problem."