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Press Release: Brookings Elementary School designated 'Monarch School USA' site

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — Aug. 17, 2018

BROOKINGS, Ore. — The City of Brookings was designated a “Monarch City USA” in May 2017, as the first city in Oregon to receive the distinction, and now Kalmiopsis Elementary School has been designated a “Monarch School USA” — one of just a handful across the country and only the second school in Oregon to receive the honor for its commitment to restoring critical habitat and forage for the conservation of monarch butterfly populations.

There will be a brief ceremony for the hanging of a “Monarch School USA” sign at 10 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 23, at the Little Bear Patch garden, at Kalmiopsis Elementary School, 650 Easy St. A celebratory potluck will follow, all are welcome.

The monarch butterfly is one of the most recognizable butterflies in North America and yet has faced declining numbers due to habitat loss and fragmentation that throughout its massive migratory range. Brookings Oregon Monarch Advocates (BOMA) is a local group of concerned individuals engaged in all aspects of conservation of the monarch butterfly. BOMA aims to educate the general public regarding captive, responsible rearing of monarchs and growth of host plants for caterpillars and adults.

Recently the school district’s Youth Transition Program students partnered with BOMA to clean out 36 beds in their Little Bear Patch garden to establish a pollinator garden containing host plants such as milkweed for caterpillars; and nectar plants for adult butterflies, as well as bees and other pollinator species. Such gardens provide important way stations for monarchs.

Monarch City USA is a national nonprofit, based in Washington State, with the goal to inspire the nation's municipalities to become supporters of the monarch butterfly by planting milkweed and nectar plants throughout their areas. Brookings City Councilor Dennis Triglia, a BOMA volunteer, learned that Monarch City USA also had a Monarch School USA program, and inquired on behalf of the schools.

"It was very exciting when Monarch City USA received the membership application for Brookings and the K-School," said Russell Stubbles, head of the Monarch City/School USA program. "We could now formally recognize the wonderful work being done by the local citizens, particularly BOMA, and the students. We have members in many states, but Brookings' participation shows the nation that the efforts to save the monarch butterfly goes from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean."

The Monarch City USA program currently has two sites in Florida, representing the East Coast. The only other school in Oregon with this Monarch School USA designation is Sisters Middle School in Sisters, Ore.

The BOMA volunteers have also participated with the school to raise monarch eggs and caterpillars to adult butterflies. After they emerge from their chrysalises and are ready for release, each butterfly is "tagged" with a small sticker containing a specific number for each butterfly and an email address for tracking their migration to overwintering sites in California. Releasing the full-grown butterflies has been a highlight of the year for several elementary classrooms.

"It is a citizen science effort and a wonderful educational tool in the STEM toolbox for the students," Triglia said.

BOMA is planning a First Annual Monarch Festival from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 15, at Azalea Park in Brookings. The event aims to recruit and teach more citizen scientists to plan milkweed plants and how to raise and monitor monarchs.

For more information on Monarch City USA, see monarchcityusa.com.

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