

Planting trees for the planet

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Plant for the Planet

- **What:** A worldwide nonprofit that has trained a network of more than 34,000 children to be Climate Justice Ambassadors to plant trees and to spread the vision of climate justice and global citizenship.
- **Contact:** Pam Vergun, vergun@alumni.stanford.edu
- **Learn more:** www.plant-for-the-planet.org

Columbia Springs

- **What:** Nonprofit organization that delivers environmental education and services to the community through on-site education for students in kindergarten through college, and off-site through outreach programs.
- **Where:** 12208 S.E. Evergreen Highway.
- **Contact:** 360-882-0936.
- **Learn more:** www.columbiasprings.org

Calla Saul hugged a potted Douglas fir seedling to her chest and sprinted across a meadow at Columbia Springs on Saturday.

She was among more than 40 kids and their parents who hiked over a bridge, through the woods and into a soggy meadow to plant evergreen trees. These were not ordinary kids. They were Climate Justice Ambassadors volunteering for a worldwide effort called Plant for the Planet, which is sponsored by the United Nations. The seven trees they planted joined another 14 billion trees planted by similar youth volunteers around the globe.

The all-day Plant for the Planet Academy was a joint effort of Columbia Springs and Plant for the Planet. Not only did youth ages 8 to 17 plant trees, but they also learned about climate change, how to organize planting parties and how to make presentations about climate change.

"I do a lot of climate work," said Jeremy Clark, 11, from Portland. He was one of the six trained Climate Justice Ambassador leaders training new ambassadors.

"With my friend, Charlie, I have a blog about climate change, TwoGreenleaves.org," Jeremy said. "I got involved with Plant for the Planet last summer during a multi-faith environmental summer camp. I want to be a climatologist, someone who studies climate change."

As the group leader, Jeremy instructed the other two youth in his group, Braydon Haygood and Calla Saul, both from Vancouver, in planting their Douglas fir seedling. The boys vigorously dug a hole. Eventually, the seedling was deposited in the soft ground. All three kids used their hands to cover the roots.

The event was spearheaded by Pam Vergun, a Plant for the Planet volunteer from Beaverton, Ore. In searching for environmental volunteer opportunities for her children, Vergun discovered Plant for the Planet, but the closest chapter she found was in Seattle. So she drove her kids to Seattle to plant trees and learn how to talk to others about the importance of planting trees.

“The one-day academies are some of the best environmental workshops I’ve seen for kids,” Vergun said. “My plan was to try to get one here, and then to keep talking to people.”

Frustrated with the lack of a local Plant for the Planet venue, she contacted Jenna Kallestad, education coordinator at Columbia Springs.

“We have 38 new ambassadors today and six returning ambassadors training the new ones,” Kallestad said as she handed kids plastic tree guards to protect the seedlings from deer and beavers. “That’s the model of Plant for the Planet. Children teaching other children. Now these 38 new ambassadors will teach others.”

Looking at the kids planting trees around her, she added, “This is our first Plant for the Planet event. It’s definitely proven there’s interest.”

Nearby, Braydon, Calla and Jeremy brushed the dirt from their hands and announced they had named their tree Felix, after the founder of Plant for the Planet.