

Planting conifers to clean the air

BY LINDA DETROY ALEXANDER
lindaa@milehighnews.com

Thanks to a \$15,000 grant to the Institute for Environmental Solutions from Xcel Energy, kids who attend Mitchell Elementary will be able to breathe cleaner air.

On Sunday, May 1, a cadre of Mitchell students and about 40 parents and other adult volunteers will plant 35-40 trees to provide a buffer between the school and Highway 93. The Trees for Healthy Kids and Community Project is intended to help cut air and noise pollution and provide educational opportunities at the school. School administrators, PTA members, city and county officials, and staff at the institute worked together to come up with the plan. The non-profit institute is headquartered in Denver and specializes in addressing complex environmental challenges.

Before the trees are planted, though, students are helping develop a tree-related education program to show how important trees are.

"Part of the grant is an educational program," parent coordinator Tracy Fletcher said. She has two children at the school.

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the day of the planting with educational activities for everyone to get involved in," she said. "They'll be looking at tree rings, what animals live in trees, and things like that. And in the long term, we're planning for each grade to adopt a tree. They can name it, study it and, sit and read by it."

Fletcher said Kevin Lyles, a landscape architect with Confluent Designs in Longmont, volunteered his time to develop the plan for the school. City of Golden Forester David High helped with the selection of the trees, which include pine, fir, hackberry, Kentucky coffeetree, horse chestnut and Russian hawthorn.

"The conifers were chosen because they will do best in absorbing the noise and air pollution from the highway," High said. "The other trees were chosen mainly for ornamental value but also to provide a little shade."

The city will dig the holes, and the tree-planting teams will simply need to set the trees in the holes, fill them in, mulch and water. The event will take place from 9 a.m. to noon, with the trees being planted in the front of the school at 201 Rubey Drive.

"David has helped us get a tree to plant on Arbor Day for several years, and Kevin came out and walked around the building," she said. "He asked about our concerns, and then created the plan."

"The school doesn't sit in a neighborhood, surrounded by houses," Fletcher said. "The playground has no shade, there's not protection from the wind. The plan includes more phases than what the grant will pay for, such as planting trees around the playground to protect it. We'll work to get another grant or do some fundraising for that."