

# Kids Korner

## 'Country' In The Boy Propates Gardening

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EBENSBURG (Cambria Co.)—"You can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy."

This statement is quite appropriate when speaking of John Drahnak of R.D. Ebensburg, Cambria County.

Drahnak was born and raised on a farm north of Barnesboro and his upbringing has shaped his values concerning his respect for nature. He credits his father and grandfather for creating the interest and providing the inspiration for gardening, which he enjoys so much.

Drahnak is listed as a "Master Gardener" of Cambria County. The Master Gardener program is a volunteer program sponsored by the Penn State cooperative extension. Master Gardeners undergo training in plant science, integrated pest management, pesticide safety, plant propagation, soil science, plant diseases, and insect pests. Drahnak feels that by being involved in this program he is "giving back" to his community.

As a Master Gardener, Drahnak answers questions on crops, lawns, houseplants, and gardens. If requested, he will visit a garden or a landscaping site to offer his advice. He has been a featured speaker at local Garden Clubs, Scout groups, and 4-H groups. Last year he was a moderator at the National Conference for Master Gardeners. This conference, held in Lancaster, was attended by 500 people from across the country.

In one unique situation he has worked with the Cambria County Probation Office. In this case Drahnak had the delinquents from the County Juvenile Detention Home plant flowers around the Cambria County Courthouse and Laurel Crest Manor, the county home for the aged.

After working in area coal mines for 33 years, Drahnak took the position as "Building and Grounds Supervisor" for the Northern Cambria School District

in Barnesboro. He is very comfortable in this supervisory position and is able to put his gardening expertise to good use. Drahnak is a certified pesticide applicator who must periodically recertify. The children who attend Northern Cambria are his prime concern, and he is very conscientious about the buildings and grounds which he maintains. Drahnak is quick to point out that no spraying is done at any of the schools until the children have vacated the premises for the summer. The most current methods of cleaning are used inside the buildings with a constant awareness of hypersensitivity. His pesticide certification also allows him to properly care for the district swimming pool.

The students at Northern Cambria Elementary/Middle School have benefitted greatly from Drahnak's current project. A few weeks ago he went into each classroom from kindergarten through grade 5. A total of more than 500 students was involved. Each student received a styrofoam cup filled with a growing medium. After a short lesson on seeds and germination, adjusted appropriately for the different age groups, each student planted two marigold seeds.

The cups were left in the individual classrooms so that the students could water them and watch their progress. Any student who had seeds which did not germinate were to see Drahnak so that they could replant in order to be involved in the next phase of the project.

This next step came on a nice sunny day last week. Drahnak resembled the "Pied Piper" leading one class after another outside to plant the flowers around the school. On the way out, he received puzzled looks from some of the younger children when he asked to see their "green thumbs."

The kindergarten classes did the landscaping around the flagpole. These young children were excited to take the marigolds out of the styrofoam cups, dig a hole



John Drahnak resembles the "Pied Piper" with all of this kindergarten class following him.

with their hands, and plant the flowers. The root systems of their plants seemed to fascinate them. Only a few children didn't want to get their hands dirty, but with a little gentle coaxing from Drahnak, they planted and even seemed to enjoy it. When all of the flowers were planted, Drahnak invited the children to come back and see the progress their flowers make over the summer.

Besides beautifying the school grounds at very minimal cost (more than 1,000 flowers had been planted by the students), John feels that the students get a lot of satisfaction from this project. Many of these children never had a garden and there is a lot of excitement in starting something from seed and watching it grow. John likes to pass this enjoyment down to those who are not as fortunate as he was growing up on a farm.

This easy-going man really seems to have a "flair" for work-



Kindergarten student, John Getsy, says that his favorite part is "digging."

ing with children. While they were outdoors planting, never once did he tell a child to plant in a particular spot. When questioned about this he replied that he likes to see the children plant as they see things in nature, not merely set the plants up like soldiers. He feels that this planting will give them pride in their school and their surroundings. Vandalism has not been a problem in the past and Drahnak attributes this to the fact that the students have done some of the work.

At home, Drahnak and his wife Lois, tend to a 9,000 square foot garden in which they grow all of the usual assortment of vegetables, which Lois will then can and freeze. The Drahnaks do not purchase any plants for the garden but start everything from seed in the greenhouse which they have built onto their home.

The Drahnaks are the parents of six children: John, Theresa, Paul, Richard, Kevin, and Mark. Kevin shares his father's passion for gardening and this has helped pave the way for a career in horticulture. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in horticulture at Penn State and hopes to obtain employment with a large nursery. There are also three grandchild-

dren, Emily, Morgan, and Richard and a fourth "on the way." Two-year-old Richard loves to garden and dig with his "novel." He is not the least bit afraid to dirty his hands and he especially likes to help grandpap water his plants.

In his "spare" time, John enjoys hunting, fishing, bowling, and furniture building. He builds gun-cases, waterbeds, curio cabinets, and "things unusual." This includes items which are difficult to find such as the "left-handed" desk which he built this past winter. Most of his spare time at home though is spent in the garden or his greenhouse.

In his home greenhouse, Drahnak has some things which are considered "exotic." He has a cactus, two banana trees, a grapefruit tree, and orchids. He also has many gardening "gadgets."

Drahnak really enjoys being a part of the Master Gardener program and is proud that he has helped to build interest in it. He has definitely touched the lives of many young people and for him the reward seems to come in the wide-eyed fascination evident on the faces of the children.

For more information on Penn State Master Gardening, contact your local extension office.



Drahnak, explains how to remove plants from their styrofoam cups. The students seem to be amazed at the "root system." Drahnak then invites the students to plant their flowers and "come back when you go to first grade to see how much it has grown."