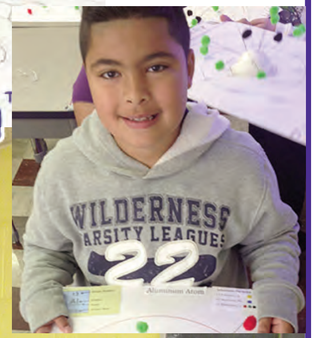
GE SOWS SEEDS OF VOLUNTEERISM IN LYNN SCHOOLS

Victor Zakak does some planting at Hood.

GE employees who helped spruce up the Hood School included Peter Rock, Bob Kursmark, Ron Chiappini, George Berube, John Ramsey, Victor Zakak and Mark Nestor.



At left, Anthony Cedeno and Luz Gomez Solis work on a project. Below, Kenneth Pleytez displays his work.

GE employees Katherine Darveau and Jim Usher paint a classroom at Hood School.

By Meaghan Casey

A legacy of good citizenship runs deep in the culture of GE, where, for more than a century, its employees have dedicated millions of volunteer hours to communities such as Lynn.

The work of these volunteers may go unpaid, but it does not go unappreciated—as evident by the gratitude of students and teachers at Hood Elementary School.

Prior to the opening day of school, a group of 17 GE employees visited Hood to make school improvements—landscaping, gardening and painting classrooms, stairs, ramps and games in the school yard.

"They were wonderful and so accommodating," said Hood Principal Gayle Dufour. "We gave them our wish list and they came back with supplies and tools and did a beautiful job. Parents, students and neighbors all noticed. When you have pride in your school and your community, everyone benefits."

"Volunteering is a GE corporate initiative and we try to do it as often as we can get people together," said Bob Kursmark, Chief Consulting Engineer for GE Aviation, who was one of the 17 volunteers at Hood.

GE also supports Lynn Public Schools through the KnowAtom program, an inquiry-based science curriculum that puts students on the path to excellence in science and engineering. In July, Lynn's GE Volunteers Council received one of just three corporate Education Impact Awards given globally for implementing sustainable solutions in education. The Council was recognized for its work with KnowAtom because what began in 2009 as a project in four schools is now a sustainable solution for science achievement in all the city's elementary schools. As a result, the council awarded Lynn Public Schools $2,500 to be used for various improvement projects at several schools.

"GE volunteers are igniting a passion to teach and learn science, technology, engineering and math," said KnowAtom CEO Francis Vigeant. "Their impact has spread district-wide in one of the 10 largest urban school districts in Massachusetts. It's hard to imagine a greater gift than equipping our youngest neighbors for a lifetime of opportunity and success."

KnowAtom's team of science educators developed the classroom-tested curriculum that includes teacher background information, lesson plans, visual aids, vocabulary and concept assessments, as well as common core connections to math, English language arts, and history/social studies. The curriculum is carefully aligned with state and Next Generation Science Standards. KnowAtom empowers teachers to guide students through fun, inquiry-based learning in which students master the scientific processes and the engineering design process. GE volunteers, led by Arati Bennett, Joseph Burger, Heather Caplan, Ric DeLisio, Anthony Mathis, Carol Wallis and Shawn Warren, provided funding, assisted teachers with professional development and worked with students in the classroom on their experiments.

Lincoln-Thompson Elementary School began using KnowAtom in 2010, and it has seen remarkable improvement in its MCAS scores. In just four years, the school has improved proficiency in fifth-grade Science and Technology/Engineering by nearly 50 points.

"We went from 36 percent in the advanced and proficient categories in 2009 without KnowAtom to 83 percent advanced or proficient in 2013," said Lincoln-Thompson Principal Helen Mihos. "That's a dramatic impact."

The program has had such tremendous success in improving the district's science achievement scores that the Lynn School Committee voted to fund KnowAtom as the core science curriculum in all elementary schools for the 2013–2014 school year. The Gelfand Family Charitable Trust provided generous philanthropic support to match the support and continue the efforts of GE, the Lynn Business Education Foundation and Footprint Energy to ensure success in STEM education with KnowAtom for Marshall Middle School, as well as the experimental STEM Lab at Tracy Elementary. The Hood School, which was named a Level 1 School this year, is in its second year implementing the KnowAtom curriculum. Dufour praises the hands-on material and interdisciplinary content.

"Our teachers love having it and the children really look forward to it," said Dufour. "They're building background in a lot of subject areas and understanding the scientific process."