

**Times Argus**

This is a printer friendly version of an article from [www.timesargus.com](http://www.timesargus.com)  
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

Article published Oct 26, 2010

## **Planting the seeds of knowledge**

PLAINFIELD — Adults who complain you can't rely on today's youth haven't worked with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps recently.

An alternative education program operated through the VYCC has students at U-32 High School partnering with local organizations and community members to practice a hands-on approach to education.

Recently, the 10 students involved in the program will spend their afternoons with permaculturist Nicko Rubin, owner of East Hill Tree Farm in Plainfield, and U-32 instructors Amanda Garland and Don Maryanski to learn about sustainable agriculture practices Rubin utilizes at his farm.

"These are high-energy, enthusiastic students with varying learning styles," Garland said as several students worked at identifying plum trees in one of Rubin's orchards. "This is an opportunity to offer an education experience that meets the student as a whole."

According to the VYCC website, since 1985, the VYCC has served young people from every county and nearly every town in Vermont and has completed several million dollars worth of priority conservation work. The nonprofit has also established partnerships with agencies and organizations, such as the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service and Green Mountain Club.

VYCC is a private nonprofit organization that operates via strong partnerships with public agencies, in addition to private support from corporations, foundations and individuals, the VYCC site states.

Garland said students who participate in the program have two or three core classes they take in addition to the VYCC, and credits from the program can be applied to several different subjects. Before coming to the farm that day the students had spent several hours in the classroom writing about and planning for the project, Garland said.

"The students are interested and engaged," Maryanski said. "This is an exciting opportunity for these guys. They really get a lot experience from this."

"It's learning the way I like to learn," Kyle Baird said, a U-32 sophomore, while scooping compost into a bucket. "I enjoy the community members I've gotten to work with."

"The (VYCC) mission is to teach personal responsibility, leadership and team building," Garland said. "The students are learning more than just agricultural science."

"It's sustainability living through education," Rubin said as he hauled buckets of compost out to some trees students had previously weeded around. "It's partnerships like these that are at the heart of permaculture."

The program already has worked on several projects this year. The projects are posted on the crew's blog, which can be seen on the VYCC's website, [www.vycc.org](http://www.vycc.org). It includes posts of work done with The Nature Conservancy in an effort to remove an invasive bush species from the U-32 campus and replace the bushes with apple trees that Rubin donated to the project.

Earlier this semester, the crew worked in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Friends of the Winooski River and the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District, to plant more than 100 trees and shrubs to help improve a buffer zone along the edge of the Pekin Brook in Calais.

"My favorite project was planting the blueberry bushes at the school," said Chris Perry, a freshman, of the project. Another project that focused on edible landscapes. The crew planted 15 bushes in a bed they prepared beside the school building.

Other area schools also participating in the VYCC program include Cabot, Twinfield, Harwood, Lamoille, Montpelier, Mount Mansfield, Spaulding, Woodstock and the Center for Technology in Essex.

Future projects for the crew include starting a tree nursery on the U-32 campus and maple-sugaring in the spring.

---