



Celia Tobin / Contributing photographer

DAQUELL SIMMONS (right), 14, an incoming freshman at Fowler High School, plants prairie grass Monday as Kenson Jeffrey, a senior at the State University College of Environ-

mental Science and Forestry, dig holes and Anthony Eallonardo, a graduate student at SUNY ESF, waters. Eallonardo has spent weeks trying to restore the salt marsh in Solvay.

Turning Over a Wasteland

Teens help environment in summer program from ESF

By **Delen Goldberg**
Staff writer

Royell Gerton raced around a Solvay waste bed Monday, dodging pickaxes and trays of plants.

One moment, he sank a shovel into the earth. The next, he splashed water on a group of dune plants. He darted around friends, wiping sweat from his head and adjusting his work gloves.

"Don't you know I'm helping the environment, man?" Gerton asked a buddy.

Gerton, 14, an incoming freshman at Corcoran High School, joined 16 other Syracuse teens to help restore a salt marsh in a Solvay waste bed, a former dumping site for Allied Chemical Co.

The 14- and 15-year-olds — participants in a CNY Works job program and

horticulture students at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central High School — spent the morning digging holes, planting prairie grass and learning about the history of industrial waste around Onondaga Lake.

As part of the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry's SCIENCE (Summer Camps Investigating Ecology in Neighborhoods and City Environments) program, the teens lent a hand to university students and professors working to transform the salty dump into a thriving habitat.

"It's really, really hot, but it's helping our community, so I'll do it," Gerton said in between plantings. "It's no longer just a pile of dirt. There's something to look at."

SUNY ESF graduate student Anthony Eallonardo, under the guidance of professor Donald Leopold, has spent several weeks filling a two-acre plot of land with about 10,000 grass and legume plugs. The anticipated result: a native salt marsh, which will help contain runoff, prevent erosion and attract wildlife to the formerly polluted area.

"There's only a handful of salt marshes left in Northeastern North America," said Eallonardo, 27, of Nedrow. "They used to be quite prevalent around Onondaga Lake."

For decades, Allied Chemical dumped waste from its massive soda ash plant on the land off Gere Lock Road, leaving the site a salty mess.

By helping restore the area, the teens



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WORKING ON restoring a salt marsh Monday in Solway are (from left) Lauren Hahn, a junior at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry; Terrell Gordon, an eighth-grader at Grant Middle School; Lizz Mulligan, a junior at SUNY ESF; and Ronyell Gerton, a freshman at Corcoran High School.

Students learn about native 'plants

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got a chance to learn about native plants and grasses, the area's cultural history and the responsibility of holding a job. The students received a small salary for the work they did.

"It's taking kids from a traditional school setting and exposing them, teaching them about

resources in their own backyard," said Thomas Hughes, a SUNY ESF project staff associate. "It's amazing to see how they respond."

The teens worked on an 1,800-foot section of soil. Less than two hours in, they had filled in about a third of the plot-

"Any number of plants they

put in will be really beneficial to the site," Hughes said.

"It's pretty fun," said Dupree Orr, 15, a soon-to-be 10th-grader at Corcoran. "I enjoy helping the environment, and it's helping us. I'm making a difference for the future, and for the world, too."

Delen Goldberg can be reached at dgoldberg@syracuse.com or 470-2274.