

# First Green Comes to the Midwest



*Larry Gilhuly, Director of Northwest Region, USGA Green Section, is surrounded by students during a field trip.*

Cathy Relyea from the First Green Foundation will introduce First Green, an innovative environmental education outreach program using golf courses as environmental learning labs, at the August 26 MAGCS monthly meeting at Harborside International.

She'll be joined by representatives from the Illinois and Indiana Sea Grant Program (IISG). First Green and IISG are seeking to bring First Green to the Chicago area, with help from the MAGCS. IISG will be applying for a second round of funding this fall to provide superintendent resources kits, training for superintendents, and identify classroom teachers.

## What is First Green?

First Green is an innovative environmental education outreach program using golf courses as environmental learning labs. First Green coordinates outdoor STEM "learning labs" at golf courses that allow students to perform hands-on experiments and tests, all within the focus of their schools' environmental science and/or environmental horticulture curricula. In these outdoor "labs" students test water quality, collect soil samples, identify plants, do math activities and work with local issues such as stream-bed or owl-nest restoration. Many of the field trips involve community organizations. In Bellevue, Wash., the city's Stream Team often has a learning station at Glendale Country Club's field trips and engages students in identifying macro-invertebrates (bugs) from the Glendale pond.

## Hosting a Field Trip

Golf course superintendents are key players in a First Green field trip, working with the teacher to select a lesson or lessons from the First Green website ([www.thefirstgreen.org](http://www.thefirstgreen.org)) that fit what the students are learning in class. Superintendents are the subject matter experts and have plenty of knowledge to share. With the help of the planning checklists and lesson plans on the First Green website, superintendents can host their own field trips. While sometimes a little apprehensive at hosting their first field trips, superintendents love the interaction with inquisitive students and are quickly sold on the benefits of reaching out to

the community. Frank Tichenor, Golf Course Superintendent at Forest Hill Field Club in Bloomfield, New Jersey says after his first field trip, "I have to say ... yesterday was one of the best days I have ever spent on a golf course!"

## Growing the Game

Over 15,000 students have been on First Green field trips. Each field trip reaches an estimated 230 people with environmental and golf messages (due to students sharing with friends and families and teachers sharing with colleagues). For many students, a First Green field trip is their first foray onto a golf course.

The United States Golf Association (USGA) awarded First Green STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) grants in 2013 and 2014 to help in expanding from Washington into Oregon, California, Utah, Colorado, New Jersey and British Columbia. @

