

# Giving PEACE a Chance

By Karen V. Contino

Local students have joined together with the City of Winter Park and the Olive Trees Foundation for Peace for a planting project that celebrates peace and diversity.



Photos by the City of Winter Park.

(left to right) Jim Williams, Winter Park City Manager; John Holland, Director of Parks & Recreation; Drew Sexton, Hebrew Day School; Mayor David C. Strong; Ari Miller, Hebrew Day School; Bethany Gincras and Lauren Lu, Orangethicket Christian School (left).

Over 70 local middle school students donated their time and efforts to plant trees for peace through the Olive Trees Foundation (below).

The array of 30-gallon shade trees was generously donated by the City of Winter Park's Forestry Division and was strategically planted on the banks of Lake Knowles and Lake Wilbur. Keep Winter Park Beautiful also donated gloves and T-shirts.

### Keeping Hope Alive

In addition to the tree-planting, the local project includes an exchange of students, in which 125 to 150 children take turns visiting each other's schools and sharing their religions and cultures. Students also take part in an annual essay contest, whose winners get to visit a multi-faith camp in upstate New York.

With the help of Lucy Robertes of Winter Park, the children are also publishing *Breaking Bread* this fall, a book that will include their family recipes and stories. "This project is a great way to keep hope alive," says the organization's Education Director Louise Franklin Sheehy, who leads the program. "Today, it is easy to become jaded. This project offers new hope for our future."

Olive Trees Foundation for Peace, Inc. was founded in July 2003 by Dr. Khaled Diab of Orlando and a group of Palestinian-Americans, Jewish-Americans and other supporters. The group is a non-political, non-profit, multi-faith organization dedicated to the peace process and the well-being of all the people of Palestine, Israel and Central Florida.

Their original mission was to use donations to purchase local saplings in Israel and Palestine and then distribute and plant the trees at various approved locations. The Foundation hoped to plant one million trees, and to this date 30,000 trees have been planted throughout Israel and the Palestinian territories.

For more information on the Foundation, email Louise Sheehy at [lsheehy@aol.com](mailto:lsheehy@aol.com).

In an effort to encourage local students to appreciate diversity while building positive relationships with people of other faiths, a unique tree-planting project was recently co-hosted by the City of Winter Park and the Olive Trees Foundation for Peace. Now in its fourth year, the project was kicked off with a ceremony at Lake Knowles in Winter Park.

### Planting for Peace

Over 70 middle school students attended the ceremony from the Hebrew Day School, Orangethicket Christian School and the Muslim Academy of Central Florida. Students planted 20 trees, among them including magnolia, live oak, laurel oak, bald cypress, sycamore and red cedar.

"Although we are people from many faiths and many walks of life, we can be proud that we are striving toward a common goal—peace and unity," says City of Winter Park Mayor David Strong, who opened the ceremony. "These beautiful trees will serve as a constant reminder of our commitment to that goal and will be here for future generations to enjoy."

