

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2015

BRANDONSUN.COM

BRANDON SUN



■ **A3** RURAL ROUNDUP



■ **A4** GOING THE DISTANCE FOR HUNTINGTON'S



■ **B1** BANTAM DRAFT NEARS

Eco sanctuary takes root with tree planting blitz

BY GRAEME BRUCE

RIVERS — More than 92,000 trees to be planted on the site of an old gravel pit is the first step in transforming 60 acres of land near Rivers into an eco-education sanctuary.

About a dozen workers from Fort Alexander First Nation outside Winnipeg have spent the last few days plugging jack pine seedlings into the arid land east of Rivers. The seedlings are expected to grow

about a foot per year and into a much-needed canopy over Millenium Park.

The planting blitz is part of a larger plan for the area, the focal point of which will eventually be an enclosed classroom, which will look more like a ski chalet than a school room based on preliminary renderings.

There's even talk of powering it with a wind turbine.

The idea for the project was born after Ducks Unlimited offered a modest \$5,000

grant for wetlands preservation secured by Rivers Collegiate principal Mike Klassen, who has a masters in environmental education.

"I have a personal feeling that all education is environmental education," Klassen said. "You can teach any subject here."

That first chunk of cash in 2012 snowballed into more than \$50,000 so far from some 15 partners in Manitoba.

» See 'Students' — Page A5



Rivers Collegiate principal Mike Klassen, Rivers and Area Community Foundation chair Donna Morken, Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District manager Colleen Cuvelier and Saskatchewan River conservation summer student Curtis Westwood stand near where more than 92,000 trees will be planted at an old gravel pit on land near Rivers. (Tim Smith/Brandon Sun)



Barry Canard of Saugeen First Nation plants rows of jack pine trees along with other tree planters at the Rivers quarry site east of the town of Rivers on Tuesday. More than 92,000 trees are being planted as part of a reclamation project for the area. (Photos by Tim Smith/Brandon Sun)

» Students pitching in to transform wetlands

Continued from Page A1

“We looked at the area and said ‘this could be a lot more than what it is,’” said Donna Morken, chair of Rivers and Area Community Foundation, one of several organizations pitching in cash for the project which will be part of Ducks Unlimited’s network of wetlands dubbed “centres of excellence.”

Before the classroom itself becomes a reality, however, more funding has to come in, but Rivers Collegiate students have been hard at work taking care of other parts of the park.

Shop students are building docks and a boardwalk along the wetlands and in the fall several students hand-picked invasive clover to stop it from choking out the biodiversity of the area.

“The vision is to create a learning centre for our students,” said Reg Klassen, superintendent of the Rolling River School Division. “This is



Mark Bunn of Saugeen First Nation loads up his bags with jack pine trees while planting trees with others at the Rivers quarry site east of the town of Rivers on Tuesday.

going to become much more than a place for our school students to come, it’s a place for students from schools outside our division to come and learn about the natural habitat around us.”

The jack pines are being planted on the former railway gravel pit by Tree Canada on behalf of CN Rail through an environmental grant, which is fitting since Rivers itself was built by the railroad industry.

The old pit has long been

overgrown with brush since it closed several decades ago.

With funds from a Manitoba Hydro grant another eight mature trees will also be planted on the north side of the land to act as a barrier to wind and snow.

“Establishing permanent tree cover will be a blessing for the site,” said Ken Fosty, community adviser with Tree Canada.

» gbruce@brandonsun.com

» Twitter: @grjbruce