



Bringing Science Learning to the Table Tammy Bird, Science Teacher, Carson High School – UCLA Science Project

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Tammy Bird, Science Teacher, Carson High School – UCLA Science Project

By Lynn Kim John, Director, UCLA Science Project

On March 1, 2012, a group of Carson High School teachers, leaders, students, community members, and philanthropists gathered around an urban garden to celebrate the ribbon-cutting of a windmill by the Mayor of Carson.

Carson High School, under the leadership and vision of teacher Tammy Bird, spent years planning and building a garden; and now with the opening of the windmill it is flourishing and self-sustaining, driven by the power of the wind. During the ribbon-cutting ceremony, proud students shared their thoughts about preserving the environment, as local engineers explained the importance and significance of the windmill. While all eyes were on the windmill against the blue skies, Tammy Bird stood proudly on the sidelines.

This moment is just one of many that represent Tammy's leadership and vision coming to fruition. She has inspired teachers, moved community members to action, and most importantly touched the lives of countless students.

Tammy's journey as a teacher leader began at Crenshaw High School after teaching on a marine research vessel as a science aide at the Museum of Science and Industry. Three years into teaching, Tammy felt she needed to engage her students in new ways. She stepped "outside the box" and began her first garden project that grew into an internationally renowned entrepreneurial program called "Food from the 'Hood.'" In this program, students took the lessons from the garden and the classroom and started a salad dressing company.

Tammy witnessed dramatic changes among students when they were part of something that made a difference to them, their school and their community. Her experience, as well as research, indicated that student learning needed to be relevant in order for it to make an impact. As a next step, Tammy found resources to take groups of urban students to places like the Grand Teton National Park (in partnership with the Teton Science School). Her belief was, "...how better to open students' eyes than to take them somewhere so different from their comfort zone to realize what they have and to take care of their part of the world." Tammy continues to take groups of students to the Teton Science School and each year she witnesses the impact this experience has on each child that participates.

The garden and windmill at Carson High School is another one of Tammy's efforts to create meaningful and tangible experiences for students. This was no small effort. The garden houses live animals, fountains, benches, walkways--all made by students. It has become a true project-based learning experience--one that will indeed have a lifelong impact on students in the community.

Tammy Bird has been teaching for 27 years and for the past 15 she has been part of the UCLA Science Project Leadership Team. In this role, she has developed as a well-respected teacher leader in science content and project-based pedagogy.