

Smokey Bear takes fire safety message to Delaware's largest kindergarten program (photos)

An estimated 535 kindergarten students at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center in Magnolia got a first-hand lesson in fire safety and prevention from the iconic Smokey Bear, with each child asked to pledge "never to play with matches" and parting with a gift bag of Smokey Bear school supplies. McIlvaine, located in the Caesar Rodney School District and representing the largest kindergarten program in the First State, was an ideal audience for Smokey's timeless message that "Only you can prevent wildfires."

The annual wildfire prevention program, sponsored by the Delaware Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and coordinated by Trainer-Educator Ashley Peebles, is timed to coincide with the observance of National Fire Prevention Month in October. The interactive school-based program, which reaches approximately 9,000 students each year, discusses the many benefits of trees (oxygen, food, shelter, shade and heat, wildlife habitat, and wood products) and then explains why it's so important to protect them from fire. After a short video about the dangers of wildfire, students get the chance to meet Smokey Bear in person and are asked to take the "Smokey Pledge" to never play with matches and to always be careful with fire. As a commemorative gift, each student receives a gift bag of Smokey Bear school supplies.

While the program is targeted squarely at the youngest students in Delaware's schools, most of the gift bags are prepared through the generosity and selfless efforts of senior citizen volunteers from Dover and Wilmington. As they have done for many years, seniors from Dover's Modern Maturity Center prepared 2,000 gift bags for the Smokey Bear program, and, also this year, volunteers from Park View Apartments in

Wilmington also prepared 2,000 bags.

For more information, contact Ashley Peebles at 302-698-4551 or ashley.peebles@delaware.gov.



The Delaware Forest Service's Ashley Peebles hands a gift bag of Smokey Bear school supplies to kindergarten student Paul Bonavita after he pledged to Smokey Bear that he will never play with matches. The Forest Service presented their annual fire prevention program this week to an estimated 535 students at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center in Magnolia – the largest kindergarten program in the First State.



Smokey Bear greeted kindergarten student Avery Lykens as part of the Delaware Forest Service's annual fire prevention and safety program held at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center in Magnolia. An estimated 535 students took part and were asked to pledge never to play with matches as part of National Fire Prevention Month in October.



Taking the pledge: Smokey Bear greets kindergarten students William Lorentz (shaking hands) and Drake Nelson as they pledge to never play with matches as part of the Delaware Forest Service's annual wildfire safety and prevention program that was presented to an estimated 535 students at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center in Magnolia.



Delaware Forest Service Education Coordinator Ashley Peebles hands a gift bag of Smokey Bear school supplies to James Callis, one of 535 kindergarten students at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center in Magnolia who participated in the annual fire safety and prevention program featuring Smokey Bear. The Forest Service-sponsored program reaches approximately 9,000 children in Delaware each year.



Dorothy Rice was part of the group of volunteers at Park View Apartments in Wilmington who helped prepare 2,000 Smokey Bear gift bags for the Delaware Forest Service's annual fire prevention education program.