

EarthKeepers prepare for next project

MARQUETTE – The Upper Peninsula interfaith EarthKeepers will create a forest for Earth Day 2009 as 12,000 trees are planted by members from about 100 churches and temples across northern Michigan.

The public is invited to an Earth Day 2009 blessing of the trees ceremony at 3:30 p.m. April 22 next to the Presque Isle pavilion. Bishops and other leaders from 10 faiths will plant the first of 12,000 12- to 16-inch white spruce and red pine trees.

“The EarthKeeper project this year is one where people from across the Upper Peninsula will see tangible results of their earth stewardship,” said Gail Griffith, EarthKeeper Implementation Team co-chair. “I hope that congregations involve their young people in their planning and planting.”

Starting on Thursday’s editorial page, The Mining Journal will print a series of weekly columns from EarthKeepers discussing the organization and its mission.

The EarthKeepers include 10 religious denominations with more than 150 participating churches and temples, the nonprofit Superior Watershed Partnership, the nonprofit Cedar Tree Institute and the Northern Michigan University EarthKeeper Student Team.

Founded in 2004, the EarthKeeper Covenant has been signed by the leaders of 0 faith communities: Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalist, Baha’i, Jewish, Zen Buddhist and the Lake Superior Friends (Quakers).

“Each year the staff at the Superior Watershed Partnership looks forward to helping the EarthKeepers coordinate an event,” said Carl Lindquist, SWP executive director. “It’s fun and it helps further our long term protec-

tion and restoration goals for local watersheds and the Great Lakes.”

The trees have been purchased or donated by the U.P. EarthKeepers, SWP, Holli Forest Products, Forestland Group, Plum Creek Timber Company and Meister’s Greenhouses.

On May 2, northern Michigan churches and temples participating in the project will pick up their share of the trees at local conservation district offices and have been asked to bless the seedlings before planting at numerous locations the next day assisted by the NMU EarthKeeper Student Team and other volunteers.

“Our interfaith tree planting effort is more than another conservation project,” said the Rev. Jon Magnuson, CTI executive director and EarthKeeper Initiative co-founder. “With prayers, hymns and the blessing of 12,000 seedlings, it’s a gentle proclamation of a new consciousness and commitment among our faith communities to care for God’s creation.”

This is the fifth year that U.P. EarthKeepers has launched an Earth Day environment project.

From 2005 to 2007, about 15,000 U.P. residents turned in more than 360 tons of household hazardous waste at a dozen collection sites across the U.P. Most of the items were recycled and the remainder was properly disposed under federal guidelines including electronic waste like computers, monitors and printers; cell phones; pharmaceuticals; pesticides; herbicides; oil-based paint; and vehicle batteries.

Last year, the EarthKeepers provided a household energy conservation checklist that resulted in over 3 million pounds of carbon being reduced, Lindquist said.