

**FOR IMMEDIATE**



**Flutter fest flourishes at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens**

*400 students from nine Valley schools  
participate in an annual rite of spring*

VAIL, Colo. (May 20, 2009) — Under spectacular blue skies and a few puffy white clouds, butterflies and the sounds of playful kids filled the spring air in Vail Wednesday at America’s highest botanical garden.

More than 400 Eagle County third-graders participated in the annual Butterfly Launch at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, an event that since it began in the mid-1990s has become an annual rite of spring in the Vail Valley for kids, parents and teachers.

“It was a lovely day at the Gardens, perfect for the annual Butterfly Launch,” said Amy Phillips, a member of the Gardens’ board of directors. “It’s an important community event for entire Vail Valley. Every kid who grows up here has the opportunity to participate in this program, which wouldn’t exist without the help of sponsors and a nonprofit like the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens.”

The students from 26 classes at nine public and private schools throughout Eagle County were supplied this spring with kits including a viewing net, caterpillars and food. Over the course of about a month, they raised the caterpillars, watching as they pupated and turned into Painted Lady Butterflies.

Just after noon Wednesday, after a snack supplied by Marketplace on Meadow Drive, delegates from each school assembled with their collective butterfly sanctuaries, opened the doors and watched as the butterflies they nurtured took flight for the first time.

Third-graders Citlaly Garduño and Erin Keeney, both 9, from Brush Creek Elementary School in Gypsum, especially admired one butterfly, which remained attached to Garduño’s finger long after the others had disappeared into the Gardens.

“He landed on my skirt, and I gave it to Citlaly,” said Keeney. “We named him Lollipop.”

Perhaps due to the lovely weather, many parents attended this year, as well. “Kids get to witness the life cycle all the way from caterpillar to butterfly,” said Debbie Keenan of Eagle, who came to watch her son, Colter, 9, launch his first butterfly 11 years

after her first son, Trevor, now in junior college, did the same. “I think it’s awesome the Gardens is still offering this program.”

After the launch, the students participated in games with butterfly-related themes, such as the Pollination Game, the Life Cycle Game, Bug-O, Butterfly Tic Tac Toe and a Bean Bag Toss.

“This is a great learning experience culminating with the actual launch,” said Amanda Lieb, a teacher at Edwards Elementary School, which sent 70 students to the Butterfly Launch this year. “It’s symbolic of spring, new beginnings, the life cycle itself.”

And, as always, renowned local musician Helmut Fricker entertained the students with his popular Austrian alpenhorn and squeezebox act. “I’ve been coming here since day one,” said Fricker between jokes. “It’s something these kids will never forget.”

Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, at 8,250 feet above sea level in Vail’s Ford Park, is the highest botanical garden in the United States, and perhaps the world, providing free access to an estimated 100,000 visitors annually. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for which operations and programs are funded entirely through the generosity of donors, its mission is to inspire passion for plants in high-altitude communities through beautification, conservation, education and research programs.

Recognized as the foremost authority on high-altitude plants in natural and cultivated landscapes in the Rocky Mountains, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens not only contributes staff and expertise essential to conservation efforts throughout the region, it also provides an environment for rare, exotic and imperiled alpine wildflowers and plants. It also plays an important role in encouraging summertime flower displays throughout the Vail Valley at both private homes and businesses.

For the complete events schedule or more information about the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, call 970-476-0103 or visit [www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org](http://www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org).

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*Note: Photos from the Butterfly Launch are available upon request. Photos of the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens are available at [www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org](http://www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org). — SLW*