

Plants teach students value of work

Philanthropy doesn't come easy if you're not rich. But Charles Coiner has found a way to give something back to his community and contribute to those more in need.

And, he can do it using his chosen lifestyle... gardening.

Coiner has worked out a program with Grafton School, to employ youngsters to help pot tiny seedlings at his Rock Garden herb farm at Gaylord.

"I'm never going to be able to donate \$10,000 to charity," Coiner explained, "But this allows me to fill a need and a desire to be with these kids."

This is also a case of ill fortune being turned into a happy outcome.

A windstorm in 1990 blew down Coiner's

greenhouses and the cold temperatures that night ruined all his plants. Back then, Coiner was starting all his own seedlings and they were too delicate for the kids to transplant.

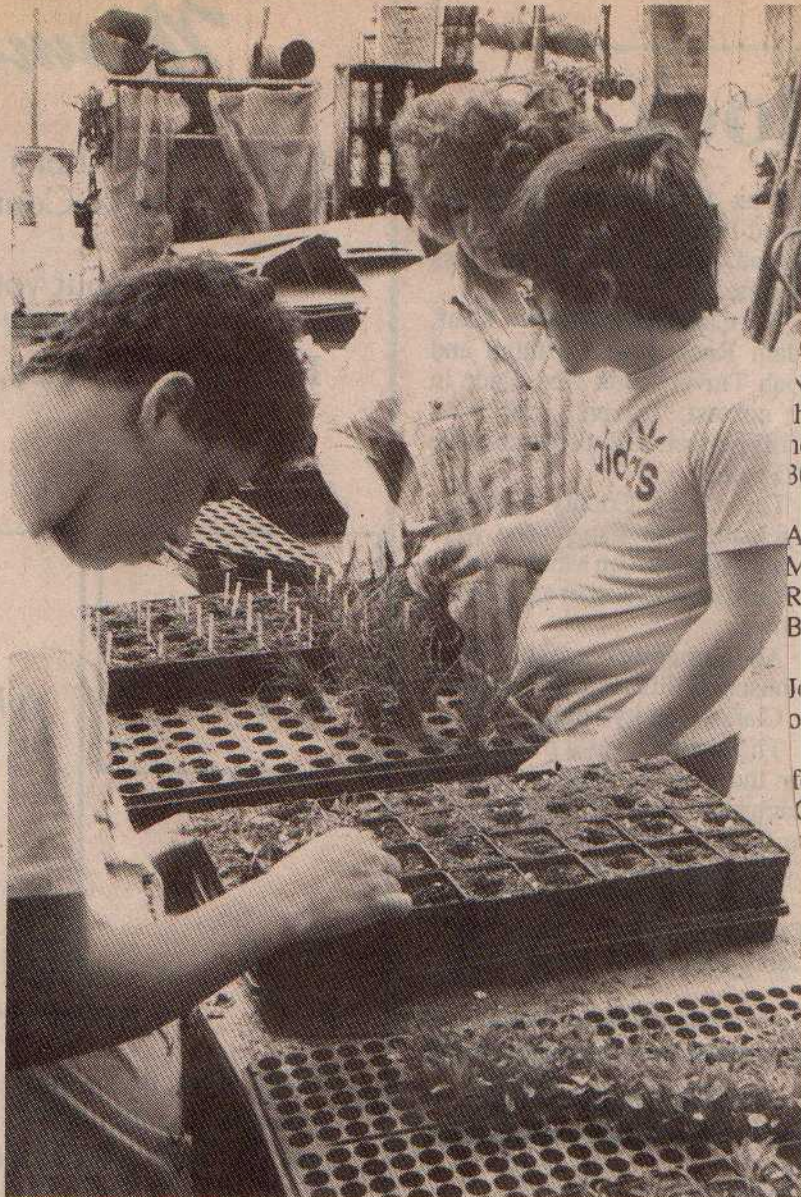
But, to get started again, he made a major change in his operation and brought started plants from Costa Rica through Florida to Clarke County. The tiny "plug" has a root ball as big as your thumb, Coiner explained, so they are not as difficult to deal with.

"This made an opportunity for them to do greenhouse work," Coiner said.

The students, about twenty in all, transplant the plugs into roomier flats that are set out in the greenhouse to develop. They also tag and label plants and help load the trucks.

"They get paid per flat, just the same as anybody else," said Coiner. The job gives them "real world" experience, and real money too.

Maureen O'Connell, who oversees the work for Grafton, said the students receive a token for each flat they complete, and, at the end of the "day," usually about two hours either in the morning or the afternoon, they can add up their tokens and calcu-



Courier Staff Photo by Val Van Meter

PLANT MASTERS: Jeremy Jackson, left, and Joe Cassell, replant tiny seedlings into largers pots, with some help from Vocational Specialist Gilda Knight. They are two of about 20 Grafton students learning and earning at The Rock Garden.

late how much money they made. They get their paychecks at the end of the week, just like their teachers at school.

"We're definitely happy with the program," said O'Connell, and all the kids are happy with the work. The Rock Garden is happy

too. We're keeping up with their schedule."

Coiner says he's benefited from an "up-beat, enthusiastic labor force," while the project fulfills one of his desires to work with handicapped children and benefit the planet in his own way.



Charles Coiner