

School recycling effort earns state recognition

Eco-conscious class at Raritan Schechter inspired peers, adults



Members of the Harlem Wizards basketball team present a Kids for Clean Communities Award to Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley students and their science teacher Andrea Barnett at a ceremony in Newark.
Photo courtesy Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley

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Sixth-graders from the Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley have inspired teachers, staff, and classmates to participate in a recycling program the students developed at the East Brunswick school.

For their efforts, the students received an appreciation award at the sixth annual Kids for Clean Communities Seminar and Awards Program at Newark's Robert Treat Hotel on May 19.

The students were entertained by and received a plaque from the Harlem Wizards basketball team.

"We went to Camp Teva, which was a big environmental camp, where we learned all about the environment and Jewish values," said student Eli Gang of Highland Park. "At the end we decided to do something to promote the environment in our school."

The Teva Learning Center is a New York-based nondenominational educational service that works with 4,000 students annually from day and religious schools, synagogues, camps, and youth groups. Groups that attend are asked to take on a project to bring back what they have learned to others.

After the Schechter students' experience at Teva earlier this year, school admissions director Ruth Bash said the youngsters brainstormed and realized the lunchroom generated a large amount of unrecycled waste.

Jacob Kibel said he almost immediately sensed the need to take action. "I don't want to grow up and live in a place where it's really hot and there's no ice or snow," explained the student, who is from Edison. "It would be horrible and I don't want that to happen to our world."

Eric Weiss of East Brunswick said the class decided to make paper recycling bins from "huge" boxes. They presented every class in the school with its own bin, explaining how they were to be used.

"We painted them and put a logo on them and made a little recycling sign," he explained. "We also put on a play and made posters to encourage recycling awareness of paper, plastic, and cans and bottles."

At the school's Purim carnival, students involved in the initiative set up a booth, said Eric Steinbach of Edison. Youngsters also could race on scooters to put items in the correct recycling bins, with winners receiving a tree pin as a prize.

Landon Kestlinger of South River said the experience taught him not only that everybody could do something to help the environment, but "that when people recycle, it helps them feel better about themselves."

Aaron Heskes of Edison said he is already taking action to save the Earth. "I'm going to tell other people to recycle," he said. "I'm going to start a compost bin in my backyard."

His twin brother, Max, added, "I think leading the school is a big responsibility and very rewarding because we've started a big movement for 140 kids. It seems that would save a huge chunk of the Earth."

The Clean Communities Council — a nonprofit corporation under contract to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection — oversees state grants for litter abatement.