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# St. Paul's named Recycling School of the Year

by Alice Lang

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If you saw a pile of empty cans, bottles, and old cell phones, you might think it was just a bunch of junk.

To students at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic School in Spartanburg, these items represent a challenge to work together on improving the environment and an opportunity to raise funds for their school.

St. Paul's Environment Club is sponsored by teachers Jane Nicol and Beverly Stribling and has been active for three years. The club has 25 members who meet twice a month.

They lead the 152 students at St. Paul's in seven special recycling initiatives. In March, St. Paul's efforts were recognized as they were chosen for a special state award.

"We won the Recycling School of the Year for 2007. It's the 'Recycle Guys Award' done by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control," said Mrs. Nicol.

St. Paul's was nominated after Nicol wrote an essay about their recycling programs and submitted it to DHEC.

"They were impressed with how we involve the whole parish and partner with different companies," explained Nicol.

Parents of students and other parishioners bring their recyclable materials to the school. They are placed in separate containers and then picked up by companies such as South Eastern Paper and United Resource Recovery.

"We recycle paper, cans, PET I plastic bottles, cell phones, ink cartridges, plastic soda carrier rings, and soda caps," said Nicol.

A number of these items bring in cash which is used for buying school equipment and funding scholarships.

"Mr. Chip Clary, our P.E. and computer teacher, works on the recycling of cell phones and ink jet and laser jet cartridges. Funding Factory receives them and pays money to St. Paul's which is used for P.E. and computer equipment," explained Nicol.

The money raised from recycling aluminum cans is awarded to the winner of a school scholarship contest.

"Our contest will have a recycle theme. Last year it was who could bring in the most cans. This year we are trying to get a contest to design a recycle shopping bag for the parish and maybe sell them," said Nicol.

Nicol, who taught for 13 years in South Africa before coming to Spartanburg, teaches students to respect the environment.

"I had a professor at college who would take us on a field trip every week. He taught me to be intrigued by nature. I hope to pass it on to my students," said Nicol.

Members of the club were eager to talk about their activities which include tree planting, making gardens, and taking field trips.

"We have nature notebooks and do drawings of flowers and rubbings of leaves of trees and plants," said Aaron Sykes.

"We planted a tree in the church garden in honor of Pope John Paul II. It made me feel happy," added Bailey Mullins.

"We are planning a bird and butterfly garden in the school grounds. We did research on flowers we could use to attract butterflies and birds," said Gaby Lahti.

"We planted flowers in front of the statue of St. Paul. It's exciting to learn about how to save the environment," said Alicia Hannouche.

Students enjoy programs with speakers who teach them about ways to preserve the environment.

"OS/1 showed us a slide show of what they do environmentally. They use light from windows. They use a water tank to gather water. I learned how to improve a house, save electricity and help the environment," said Savannah Hardcastle.

They are also able to participate in outside workshops.

"Me and Holly attended Kudzu College. We went out into the field and cut the kudzu down. They showed us techniques to kill it that don't use chemicals because it pollutes water and kills fish," said Claire Poole.

"Earlier in the year we had a special about kudzu. We went across the road and killed it and got some of the crowns, that's the main root. We learned what it does to the trees, how it affects the earth, and how it got here," said Zack Mariona.

Club members share news about their activities with the rest of the school.

"We have a bulletin board downstairs and it informs the school about what we do in the club," said Christina O'Connell, President of the Environment Club.

Students at St. Paul's are motivated to do their own part, however small, to help the environment.

"During recess, I dedicate part of my time to pulling weeds down in the field. I do it to help the grass grow and not let it be overrun with weeds," said Jake Armstrong.

Nicol is thrilled by the response of her students and their parents.

"I was amazed at how much they have learned. It's really exciting because Spartanburg and the citizens in general have become so aware," she said.

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