

Catholic school honored for its 'green' efforts

DUBUQUE, Iowa - The "green" efforts of students, teachers and staff at Resurrection Elementary School in Dubuque have paid off.

It is the first parochial school to receive the Green Vision Education Award from the Dubuque Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Agency. It was honored for a recycling program.

During ceremonies Jan. 29 in the gym, members of the solid waste agency presented the school with the Green Vision flag to hang outside the school, and a banner to display inside the building.

The Green Vision program is a cooperative effort supported by the agency, the city of Dubuque, the Dubuque County Conservation Board and Down to Earth Solutions.

Initiated by the community last spring, the program recognizes schools for their efforts in sustainable natural resource management and pollution prevention in the school and community environment.

Classroom practices, buildings and grounds maintenance and curriculum are all evaluated and suggestions are then made by the Green Vision team for advancing environmental stewardship.

With the help of principal Dave Gross and custodian John Stierman, first-grade teacher Barb Davis and fourth-grade teacher Phyllis Czarnecki initiated the program at Resurrection, a school with 300-plus students in prekindergarten through fifth grade.

The teachers said their students were excited about the program from the start and eagerly jumped in to spread the word and get the other classes involved.

Each grade appointed two monitors to oversee and encourage their classmates to step up the recycling of trash while also keeping an eye out for other ways to

conserve and improve the environment.

Recycling bins were placed in every room, along with plenty of posters reminding people to use them, said Ms. Czarnecki.

"If we knew a room was going to be used by a CCD class or a Girl Scout troop that evening, we made sure the bins and posters were in place," she added.

Ms. Davis said one of the first ideas put in place was to get rid of the plastic eating utensils from the cafeteria and go back to using silverware.

"We initially got rid of the silverware to save energy using the dishwasher, but soon found that with all the plastic that got thrown away, it made more sense to use the metal utensils," Ms. Davis told The Witness, newspaper of the Dubuque Archdiocese.

Each day students from each classroom deliver trash and recyclables to a central point where Mr. Stierman then weighs and calculates the bundles.

"The ratio between throwaways and recyclables used to be even," Mr. Stierman said. "But since we started this program, the trash has gone down 75 percent and the number of recyclables has increased 300 percent.

"We like to remind the kids that a four-foot stack of newspapers saves one whole tree," he added.

Ms. Davis said that for the school to retain its "green" status, it must keep the effort going.

Ms. Davis and Ms. Czarnecki's students call on the other classes regularly to remind them of the importance of maintaining what they have achieved and to offer suggestions such as "pulling the blinds at night," "turning off computers," and "changing to low-energy light bulbs."

To better educate parents about the program, a column called "Green Team Chatter" has been added to the school's newsletter, and last November the fourth and fifth grades put on a musical called "Assignment Earth."

"We are excited about their accomplishments and hope it inspires other schools to

get involved,” commented Bev Wagner, education and communication coordinator for the Dubuque Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Agency.