

# Maryvale students raise energy awareness

More than a few switches will be flipped in the gymnasium of Maryvale Preparatory School Feb. 27.

In an effort to raise awareness about the needs of people who can't afford their energy bills, more than 70 students are expected to gather in the Brooklandville school's gym to spend a chilly Friday night with no lights, no heat, no cell phones, no video games and no television. They'll use their time making fleece blankets for families in need, while also learning about the Fuel Fund of Maryland, which helps poor families pay their energy bills.

It's all part of a weeklong series of activities the Maryvale Fuel Fund Group is organizing for its third annual "Spread the Warmth Week."

Group members plan to play the part of power company executives, going into classrooms to shut off lights, computers and overhead projectors to demonstrate the sudden difficulties people face when they can't afford their energy bills. Several students in the upper school will carry a large trash bag in school Feb. 24-26, lugging all their consumer trash to highlight how much refuse goes into landfills. The Fuel Fund Group will also arrange for special collections of water bottles and highlight how much money students spend on luxuries.

"We're encouraging students not to take things for granted and not to use as much energy," said Francesca Cerquetti, a 16-year-old junior and a member of the Fuel Fund Group.

Jocelyn Daniel, an 18-year-old senior and facilitator of the group, said the Fuel Fund

of Maryland helps meet critical needs. The nonprofit organization assists residents of Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford and Howard counties in paying for energy. The Fuel Fund aids about 5,000 families a year.

“The biggest misconception is that it’s a straight charity,” Jocelyn said. “The people whom it assists are working hard to get back on their feet. They have to meet certain goals to help them. It’s not like welfare.”

The partnership between Maryvale and the Fuel Fund was the brainchild of Danielle Phelps, a 1994 Maryvale alumna who works as volunteer coordinator for the nonprofit.

“It’s developed into a leadership program,” said Mary Ellen Vanni, executive director of the Maryland Fuel Fund and a 1965 Maryvale alumna. “Students have taken the responsibility to flesh out the program to make it appropriate to their classmates to share some very tough facts about energy and the cost of energy and how little things can waste a lot of energy.”

The program also brings students into solidarity with the poor, Ms. Vanni said.

The executive director hopes other schools throughout the region will duplicate the program.

*For more information, call 410-821-3022.*