

Recycling initiative expands to all schools

By Kris DiLorenzo

The Dobbs Ferry Middle/High Schools launched their recycling effort on Monday, Jan. 22, when experts from the Greenburgh Nature Center, which opened its food scrap recycling program two days earlier, held recycling training for middle school students.

The GNC's Sustainability Project leader, Rachel Carpitella, and special projects leader, Pam Miner, led lively sessions in the school auditorium, while naturalist educators Lindsay Cohen and Sara Spoden supervised two sets of recycling bins in the schools' shared cafeteria as students separated plastic bottles, cans, paper, and food scraps.

Last week, the GNC trained 12 teachers, now dubbed the "Green Team," to help students see how waste disposal methods affect the planet. "They taught us how to recycle properly and raised our awareness about the choices we make," high school chemistry and physics teacher Justine Henry reported.

"We're trying to help people form habits," Schools Superintendent Lisa Brady explained, "as well as motivation. They need to understand why recycling is important, and that we're all part of it. There needs to be an acceptance that if we want to do the right thing for this planet, we have to give up certain conveniences."

Some sixth-graders formed their habits last year at Springhurst Elementary School, where a recycling and composting program has been in full swing for three years. The middle/high school isn't initiating composting yet. Approximately 800 students use that single cafeteria, so its volume of food



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Dobbs Ferry Middle School students sort their waste on Jan. 22.

Recycling

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scraps is much greater than Springhurst's. The Village of Dobbs Ferry lacks a composting facility, so for now, food scraps go out with the trash.

The GNC staff introduced the subject of recycling in entertaining fashion, including pitting two teams — the Compost Commanders and the Recycle Rescuers — against each other in determining the proper disposal method for different items. The Commanders were correct that a plastic "clamshell" container should be relegated to the bottles-cans-plastics bin, while the hamburger on a bun sitting inside it should be thrown into the food scraps bin.

A juice box tricked the Rescuers, who thought it should go into the commingled bin. However, Carpitella pointed out, a straw will get stuck in a recycling machine.

Recycling is more complex than it used to be, so the district added helpful

information to its website. Clicking on the "Dobbs Ferry High School/Middle School Recycling Kickoff" link on the homepage opens up a full menu of how recycling works, including a detailed chart titled "What Goes Where?"

Brady noted that parents play a part in the school's effort, and ultimately affect the waste stream, by choosing what their children bring for lunch. Lunch in a plastic bag is not a good idea. "They could put it in a reusable container that the kids will bring home," she suggested.

Carpitella laid out the fundamental reason for recycling: "Human consumption takes a toll on the natural environment, which in turn takes a toll on public and ecological health. By Dobbs Ferry making these strides toward zero waste, they are reducing our environmental impact."

That impact includes greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide) generated by the production, consumption, transportation, and disposal of materials made in a factory. Trucks using fossil fuel transport the waste materials to an incinerator, where

other fossil fuels are used to burn it.

"When kids put recyclables into the bins, the materials are sent to a recycling facility, where they'll be used as raw material to create new commodities such as bags, pens, cups, and paper," Carpitella elaborated. "It's far less energy intensive for a company to make products from recycled materials instead of virgin materials."

During the training session, the students learned how recycling saves money, cheering the news that there is no fee to dump materials at a recycling center. They were puzzled to learn from a Jan. 11 New York Times article that the U.S. ships plastic waste to China for recycling, but China now doesn't want it because it is "poor-quality stuff."

The school is encouraging students to top off their water bottles at new refilling stations in the hallways and common areas, rather than buying more plastic bottles. It has installed four-bin recycling sets (black for trash, blue for paper, green for plastic, foil, cans, and glass, and another green bin for compostable materials) in the caf-

eteria, outside the concession area, and in the Commons, and will soon place bins at school athletic facilities.

The school's 10-member Ecology Club is invested in the recycling effort. Middle school teacher Claudia Ducic, who has run the club for 10 years, said that initially she had proposed some ideas for them to work on, "but now they're really taking charge."

Seventh-grader Elizabeth Distefano of Dobbs Ferry said she is excited about Earth Week, which begins Monday, April 16, and culminates with Earth Day, on April 22. "We're thinking about a fair. We can show how to use an old T-shirt to make a grocery bag."

Distefano is one of the club members who recently starred in a video the school made called "Trash Talk," in which they answered questions about recycling. When the post-production process is finished, the video will be available for viewing, in locations to be determined.

"We know this isn't going to be perfect," Brady pointed out, "but there's a willingness to learn together."