

FREE

GOING GREEN

The Valley guide to an eco-friendly lifestyle

Spring 2010

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Recorder photo by Paul Franz

At The Campus School in Northampton, the use of disposables such as juice boxes is way down, thanks to a new recycling strategy that starts at home.

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Recorder/Paul Franz

Second-grade students at the Smith College Campus School collect and categorize recycling materials from the classrooms at the school.

'Pack it in, pack it out'

Valley school institutes waste-free snacks, lunches

By MAUREEN TURNER
 Special to Going Green

As any parent can attest, packing school lunches that both pass kid-muster and pack a mom-acceptable level of nutritional value can be a challenge. And if that wasn't hard enough, when Mary Ann Nessel's two kids started back to school last fall, there was an additional challenge to meet: new guidelines instituted by their school to try to reduce the amount of trash generated at lunchtime.

This year, the children's school, the Smith College Campus School in Northampton, kicked off a "waste-free snack and lunch" campaign, part of a larger effort to make the school more environmentally conscious. Families are urged to avoid items that add to the waste stream — disposable juice boxes, plastic bags, paper napkins, plastic utensils, individually packaged snacks — and instead pack lunch boxes with reusable items.

In addition, the school has taken a cue from eco-sensitive campers and hikers and adopted a new "pack it in, pack it out" rule: Anything that a kid doesn't eat from her lunchbox — and that traditionally would be tossed in the school trash barrel — instead goes home with her at the end of the day. An exception is made for recyclable

items, which are collected by the school's second-graders as part of a science and social studies project.

For Nessel, the changes weren't all that tough to accommodate. Even before the Campus School announced the campaign, she says, "I already packed the boys' sandwiches and snacks in reusable containers, and replaced paper napkins with cloth napkins." One change she did make: Instead of juice and milk boxes, she now sends their beverages in reusable bottles.

"I am also more aware of trying to avoid pre-packaged items," Nessel says. One place that's been tough: certain snacks. "While I can easily buy bulk containers of crackers and pretzels, Annie's bunny gummies" — fruit snacks that are a favorite of her kids' and one she likes because of its high vitamin C content — "can only be purchased in boxes with five individual pouches." That means the empty pouches come back home in their lunchboxes.

The Campus School's efforts to reduce waste at lunch are part of a larger "Going Green" campaign; the school also encourages families to car-pool or walk or bike to school, and has declared the school's pick-up areas "no idling zones." The lunch program, says school director Cathy Reid, was a good way to have a direct environmental

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In our next issue ... "Garbage audits" by Maureen Turner

Going Green is published quarterly by The Recorder of Greenfield, Mass. to help readers in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts and southern Vermont sustain and protect our natural resources for future generations.

Going Green offers readers a forum for their opinions and concerns; expert advice they can use at home and at work; locally written stories that objectively examine regional issues, and a community of readers to share and inspire progress toward the goal of sustainable living.

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Pack it in ...

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effect in an area that involves every child in the school — and, by extension, their families.

And the school is seeing those effects, Reid says: The use of disposable juice boxes is down, for instance, and more kids are bringing in reusable water bottles. “It really does make a gradual shift,” says Reid, who in the future hopes to see the amount of recyclables drop, replaced by reusable food containers. (That change, she adds with a laugh, might be hard on the second-grade recyclers, who take pride in the number of items they collect.)

The Campus School’s waste-free campaign is made relatively easy by the fact that all students bring their lunches from home. Such efforts can be trickier at larger schools with hot-lunch programs, where it’s harder for the school or families to control things like how food is packaged or what can be recycled. But that hasn’t stopped a number of public school systems from also taking on the challenge of reducing lunchroom waste, including the Northampton schools. That effort is being led by GREEN Teams, made up of staff and families, at each of the city’s four elementary schools.

The GREEN Team program is funded by a \$15,000 grant from the Northampton Education Foundation. The program’s coordinator, Micki Darling, a former teacher with three young boys, goes into the classrooms to teach kids about recycling and other environmental efforts. “When the kids understand why they’re being asked to do something, they’re much more willing to do it, they’re much better at doing it, and they start to take on other projects, too,” she says.

Darling first got involved in the effort when she and a fellow Bridge Street School parent kicked off a “zero-trash Friday” campaign, which asked parents to avoid packing any disposable items one day a week. Students weighed the amount of trash that was generated on that day and compared it to the trash collected other days to see the difference the effort made, Darling says. “They really got into that and thought it was fun.”

Different schools have taken on different projects, Darling explains: At Jackson Street School, for instance, compostable food scraps are collected and brought home by parent volunteers. Students at all the schools recycle their milk cartons, which has led to a drastic reduction in trash, she



Recorder/Paul Franz

At The Campus School in Northampton, the use of disposable juice boxes is down, says director Cathy Reid. Above: A second-grader collects recyclable materials after school lunch.

reports. At Northampton High School, meanwhile, a student environmental club is promoting green efforts there.

While the GREEN Teams have discussed a “pack in, pack out” policy,

Darling says, members recognize that that would be difficult, and, as one parent pointed out to her, would put a heavier burden on kids who bring their lunches from home than those who buy food in the cafeteria. One goal, she says, is to work with the schools’ food services to reduce the

amount of food packaging.

Darling knows making these kinds of changes isn’t always easy for families — including her own. “We have a very picky eater here. What we thought we’d be able to send him for lunch is so different from what we do send him for lunch,” she says. “I know it’s really hard for people.” (One good resource for both families and schools interested in making changes is the Web site

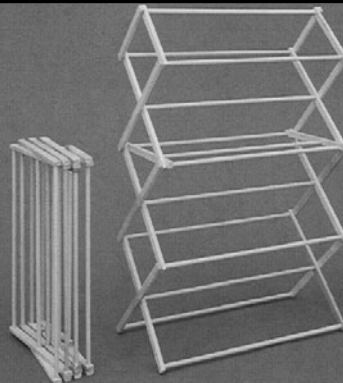
www.wastefreelunches.org.)

At the Campus School, Reid says, administrators haven’t heard much negative feedback about the waste-free lunch campaign. Still, she knows the changes haven’t been easy for all families. “It takes time on the part of par-

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Pack it in ...

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ents," she says. "It's a habit we can all develop, but we also recognize that it can be a challenge." While plastic bags and other non-reusable, non-recyclable items do still show up in some lunch boxes, she adds, children are not scolded in such cases. "We made it clear this wasn't going to create any punitive situations, or ostracism, or ragging on students. ... This is a process — it doesn't happen immediately."

Mary Ann Nessel sees the effect the effort has had on her two kids. Her oldest, a second-grader, takes part in the recycling project. "So, as far as getting the lesson behind it, I think he gets it not only from how his own lunch is packed, but he also gets to see how many containers can be recycled instead of being simply placed in the trash," she says.

Like all kindergartners, Nessel's younger child received a gift at the beginning of the year from the second-grade students: a reusable sandwich wrapper that also serves as a placemat. And, she adds, "He does seem to be more aware of trying to avoid a lot of trash left over in his lunchbox at the end of the day."

Maureen Turner is a Valley-based journalist who lives with her family in Florence. She has a master's degree in journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Going Green Notebook

Home Show & Green Fair to showcase renewable energy products

GREENFIELD — Franklin County businesses will showcase their renewable energy products at the Green Fair, part of the Home Show set for April 17 (10 a.m. to 7 p.m.) and 18 (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) at the Franklin County Fairgrounds.

One of the exhibitors, the Renewable Energy Division at Sandri of Greenfield, will display three of its state-of-the-art renewable energy products — a solar hot water system, a bulk wood pellet central heating system, and Solar Electric PV for home applications — in a major display set up under the Grandstand. Sandri is partnering with the Greenfield Business Association and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce as a major sponsor of this event. "It makes perfect sense for Sandri Companies to work with us on this year's Home Show and Green Fair," said Becky George, coordinator of this year's showcase. "The venue which has traditionally been divided between the Better Living Show and the Green Fair is becoming one event where we are encouraging innovation today for a greener and more prosperous tomorrow."

Applications for vending are available by calling (413) 774-2791 or via

e-mail at gba@franklincc.org. In 2009, the event hosted over 5,000 guests; parking and admission is by donation.

College offers free Green Living seminars

NORTH ADAMS — Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, 375 Church St., is offering a series of "Green Living Seminars" that are free and open to the public. The location is Murdock 218. For more information, call Elena Traister at (413) 662-5303 or e-mail elena.traister@mcla.edu.

Here is the schedule:

- ◆ March 4, 5:30 p.m., Sustainable design of transit systems and surrounding communities. Presented by Sam Zimbabwe, Reconnecting America.

- ◆ March 25, 5:30 p.m., Reducing waste, by Jamie Cahillance, Center for Ecological Technology.

- ◆ April 1, 5:30 p.m., Sustainable food systems: Strategies for campuses and communities, presented by John Turenne, Sustainable Food Systems.

- ◆ April 8, 5:30 p.m., Community planning to protect natural resources: Examples from the northeast region, presented by Suzi Zakowski, Audubon International.

- ◆ April 15, 5:30 p.m., Redesigning cities for the long-term health of human and natural systems, presented by Richard Register, Ecocity Builders.

Greenfield's Temple Israel goes green

GREENFIELD — This year, Temple Israel has chosen the theme, "Judaism and the Environment." Janice Colbert, education director and family educator, explains, "Our synagogue has implemented the policies of recycling, reusing and reducing. We are also focusing on ways to support our local farmers and feed the hungry in our community. We have planted and harvested vegetables and wheat from our temple garden that we have used to eat, decorate our sukkah (outdoor arbor) and make food for the community."

On March 21, 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Temple Israel invites the community to a free, green event, "Passover Matzah Making with locally grown wheat."

On May 16, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the temple will sponsor a community event at Leapingfrog Farm in Buckland to learn about principles of growing food locally and applying Jewish perspectives on the issues of sustainability and environmental awareness.

For more information, contact Colbert at (413) 772-8689 or e-mail TIHebrewschool@juno.com.

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