

Go Green School of the Week

Groton Central School

Groton, New York

Week of September 29, 2008

Everything old is new again at Groton Central School in upstate New York.

Students are recycling and reusing an amazing array of items, from food scraps to T-shirts, as part of the school's Go Green programs.

"All of these are helping our students to connect to our world and teaching them to care and take responsibility for our earth," teacher Barb Bassette said.

Groton (rhymes with cotton) has had an active recycling program for several years. But in the past three years, teachers like Bassette and Chad DeVoe have kicked the school's green efforts into high gear.

Last year, the school kicked off its *Rot-in-Groton* composting program. The high school biology club spearheaded a project to build five large compost bins to collect leftover food scraps at the school. Students no longer dump their unwanted food into the trash. Leftovers are scraped into special bins, which are dumped daily into the 4-foot-by-4-foot wooden compost bins.



The eighth-grade shop teacher devised an innovative plan for the compost bins. Wooden slats can be removed to make it easier for students to shuffle food scraps to the inner bins as the leftovers decompose. By the time the scraps make it to the middle bin, they're pure compost and ready for the school's 40-foot-by-40-foot garden, dubbed *Crops-in-Groton*.

Groton's goal is to compost at least 300 pounds of food scraps per week - or 12,000 pounds of waste per year.

"It's good because the kids see the recycling triangle," DeVoe said. "They throw their food scraps out, which breaks down into compost. We use that for the garden and then they eat (the fresh produce) again."

The school's location in New York State, between Ithaca and Syracuse, limits the growing season. Groton works with Cornell University's cooperative program for gardening and compost tips and support. Students have had bumper crops of several vegetables and plan to add watermelon and strawberries this year.

"We like helping out with the garden because it give us something to do after school, and it gives us fresh food to eat in the cafeteria," sixth-graders Savannah Wheaton and Courtney Jansen said. "We like composting because it is saving our Earth by not using up garbage dumps as fast."



Bassette, a thrift shop aficionado, started the *Goin' Green* T-shirt initiative at the middle school last year. Bassette finds cool T-shirts at thrift shops or people donate gently used shirts. The shirts are then displayed, and students can put their names in a raffle to win the T-shirt of their choice.

"It is to show kids that used is as good as new, and it is supposed to have kids think about the little things they could do

to help," Bassette said. "Truly, every little bit does help."

The kicker is that when a student wins a T-shirt, that student must pledge to try at least one new go green habit for a full week.

Bassette expanded her thrift shop idea this school year with her *Just a Dollar (or Two) Donation*. Students donate items they no longer want, such as sports jerseys, duffle bags or jewelry. Donated items are displayed in a case at school.

Students spot items they want, and then they donate a dollar - or two - to claim the item as their own. That money is donated to the school.

"Again, it teaches the recycle/used idea, but it adds the idea that by buying used and donating the dollar to their middle school, (the school) can then buy things for them that the budget doesn't cover," Bassette said. "Why spend their money at the mall when they can recycle and help at the same time?"

In addition to all of this amazing work, students regularly use a student-created trail system in the woods near the school. The entire school district has nearly 2 miles of student-created trails. DeVoe's students use the trail system to study native birds.

Groton's go green projects are so nicely embedded in the daily education program that students take it for granted that helping the environment is simply their way of life.

"Honestly, I haven't heard the term tree-hugger in a couple of years," DeVoe said with a laugh. "It's almost like it's accepted or cool to be green."

