

THE GODDARD SCHOOL CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

Urbana early childhood development center hosts recyclable materials parade, will turn off lights on Friday

By Angie Cochrun • Wednesday, March 23, 2011



Wearing a trash bag and pieces of recyclable materials, 'Litterbug' Theo, 2, marches with his peers in a parade in the hallways of the Goddard School in Urbana on Wednesday morning. The parade is part of this week's 'Stepping Up for the Environment' events. (Tom Fedor/The Gazette)

Children roaming the halls at The Goddard School® in Urbana on Wednesday morning wore vests made of grocery bags, shoes made of old boxes and hair bows fashioned out of toilet paper — even the littlest children got involved with rattles made of used bottles.

The odd outfits and toys were all a part of the early childhood educational organization's nationwide event "*Stepping Up for the Environment*" which took place this week.

The parade featured children from infants to 6 years old, in outfits made of recyclable materials; just one way teachers have been incorporating activities throughout the week to enforce the ideas of recycling and conservation.

"It's basically really letting them know that even though they're young that they can have a positive impact on the environment," said Traci Keyes, director of The Goddard School in Urbana, decked out in a skirt made of cardboard and a hat of aluminum foil and newspaper. "They're having fun and learning valuable lessons."

Crystal Carroll, a teacher for the 2-year-old class, said her students focused on not littering this week.

"We're "Don't be litterbugs!" she said, fastening the back of a plastic bag covered with recyclable materials on a student wearing colorful pipe cleaner antennae. "We're teaching them we should not throw litter on the ground."

The class of litter bugs hopped up and down around Carroll, antennae wobbling, chattering in excitement for their parade, where each class took a spin around the school showing off their recyclable-inspired fashion creations.

"They're 2 [years old] — they try to put food in our recycling bin," Carroll laughed. "But they'll learn...they had so much fun."

Keyes said all the Goddard Schools are all celebrating in their own way, some just on Friday, others throughout the week.

“I thought it would be a lot of fun for the children to celebrate the whole week,” she said,

Earlier in the week, students made invitations for friends and family to participate, decorated banners, learned about recycling and recruited their families to bring in recyclables to use in the classrooms.

The school has worked with Key Sanitation to create an effective recycling program.

Another ongoing activity is a gardening program. Students in the younger grades using mini greenhouses in their classrooms to plant vegetables and plants and participate in growing their own items, while the older grades will have a larger greenhouse.

“We feel this is very important to teach them about how plant life is very important to the environment and how to take care of nature,” Keyes said.

During the week-long event, daily activities were geared toward teaching students the importance of protecting the environment, while also focusing on the upcoming Earth Hour. Earth Hour is a celebration created by the World Wildlife Federation, where on 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, lights will switch off around the globe for Earth Hour, an event that started in 2007.

The school decided to turn off lighting from 10 to 11 a.m. on Friday morning instead of over the weekend. “Friday is our big event,” said Keyes, adding that children would be dressed in dark colors and the school had purchased glow-in-the-dark items for the event. “I think they’ll be able to have a lot of fun.”

Nearby businesses have come on board for the events, Keyes said, with many in the area turning off their lights for an hour on Friday as well.

She said the ultimate purpose of the week is to make the children aware of how to conserve energy through daily activities, whether at school or at home.