

Schools launch Zero Waste initiative

SEPTEMBER 15, 2017 BY KENDRA BAKER



Waste station in the Middlebrook School cafeteria. — Contributed photo

This school year, the Wilton Public School District will roll out one of the most comprehensive public school programs in the state — the Zero Waste Schools initiative.

The program is a joint initiative between the schools and Wilton Go Green, in partnership with Chartwells Food Service and Curbside Compost. It is supported by the Center for Eco Technology and Connecticut Green LEAF Schools.

With the slogan of "Warriors Won't Waste," Wilton's Zero Waste Schools program is designed to significantly reduce the amount of waste — primarily from cafeterias — that would otherwise be sent to landfills or for incineration.

Wilton Go Green board member Eve Silverman said the idea for Zero Waste originated after the first Wilton Go Green symposium last year, where one of the key speakers, Gary Cuneen, had “successfully implemented a comprehensive Zero Waste Schools initiative in Illinois.”

After meeting with him, Silverman said, she, Middlebrook culinary arts teacher Heather Priest and Wilton High School junior Libby Scaperotta assembled a group of teachers, administrators, community leaders, custodial staff and students to lead Wilton’s Zero Waste effort.

The program will begin this fall with a pilot at Middlebrook that incorporates waste reduction through food donations, composting, recycling and environmental conservation practices. Students will also learn and implement sustainable behaviors.

Miller-Driscoll will join in the pilot this fall with all the program components except composting and donations. As the program rolls out over the next two years, Miller-Driscoll and Wilton’s other public schools will implement the full range of the program.

Waste stations have been installed in Middlebrook and Miller-Driscoll, and they themselves, said Silverman, are “an example of sustainability.”

Wilton High School Plant Manager Jose Figueroa and his custodial staff used leftover materials to build the stations, said Silverman, “making purchase of new materials unnecessary and very economical for the district. The artwork design was donated by Willa Ratner,” she added, “and signage was funded by a grant from Wilton Go Green.”

Chartwells Food Services will redirect all food scraps into compost, which will be picked up by local organics recycling company Curbside Compost from the Middlebrook cafeteria. The food waste will then be taken to a facility in Danbury and converted into usable compost for gardeners and farmers.

At Middlebrook, a liquid dumping station will be provided that uses single-stream recycling technology — making it possible to recycle virtually all materials by just emptying them. All recycling will be directed to the City Carting & Recycling facility in Stamford.

Food Rescue US of Fairfield County will pick up uneaten food from the Middlebrook cafeteria twice weekly. Any unopened, pre-packaged or unserved, prepared food items will be eligible for donation. A refrigerator will be located at the waste stations for students to donate items they don’t intend to eat.

Assessing impact

There are “a few key metrics” that will be looked at to determine the program’s impact, said Silverman, one of which is “garbage assessment.”

A baseline assessment at Miller-Driscoll revealed more than 95% of the material in the school’s garbage could have been recycled or composted, said Silverman.

“Each school will continue these types of assessments to determine how well we are doing,” she said.

Another metric is “student awareness,” said Silverman.

"At last year's Wilton Go Green Festival, Libby ran a test of a 'how much do you know?' game, seeing if folks could say if an item should be put into garbage, recycling or compost," she said.

"From this game she created an electronic quiz, which was distributed to parents at both [Middlebrook and Miller-Driscoll] to give to their kids to get a baseline score of student knowledge."

Silverman said the quiz will be given at intervals to "assess how their knowledge is improving."

"Overall, the purpose of the pilot is to help determine how to streamline the system before we roll out to all schools," she said.

There will be assemblies, training programs for teachers and custodial staff, as well as "ambassadors" at the waste stations for "on-the-spot education," said Silverman.

Lunch monitors trained in "the specifics of the waste stations and the sustainability program," said Silverman, will serve as ambassadors at Middlebrook.

As the program is rolled out, she said, "we will be training an army of student ambassadors who will be able to go to the elementary schools as well."

There will also be ongoing educational events, said Silverman, such as competitions between classrooms to see who produces the least trash in a week.

To learn more, email Silverman at scapsilv@sbcglobal.net.

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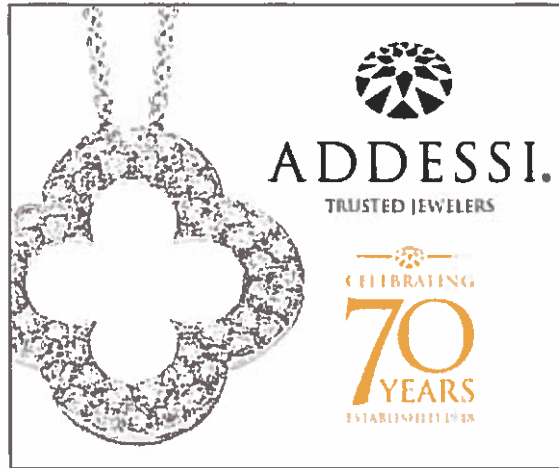
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