

Notebook

Our Lady of Fatima's Green Team

Students and staff at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School (OLF) in Renfrew were greeted by something special this fall before even entering the school—beautiful foliage, colourful blooms and thriving trees and shrubs spanning from one end of the building to the other.

In addition, next to the front entrance sidewalk off Mason Avenue, a special circular-shaped flower garden surrounding the flag pole sits as the inspiration for this entire beautification project, and a special memorial tribute to a beloved former teacher with a green thumb.

Earl Bennett taught at OLF for many years, was active in the community and was a member of town council who happened to start Flag Day in Renfrew.

“We wanted to honour his memory and thought it was appropriate to put a garden around the flag pole,” says Principal Jeannie Armstrong.

To complete this task, she formed the Green Team, a group of 30 students from Grades 2 to 7, who could help with the digging, planting, weeding and continuing care of the gardens.

Major financial assistance from an Environmental Education Grant provided \$5,000 for landscaping, grading, top soil, mulch and many of the plants now gracing the front yard.

Further support from the school council and community organizations has contributed to the gardens as well, says the principal.

“We thought it would be a good idea to beautify the front of the school, and it became a collaborative community project,” comments Armstrong. She mentions that community spirit was evident especially during the summer months, when a member of the parents’ council was diligent in watering the new seedlings and others helped to care for the new beds.

As the plants themselves will grow, so has the opportunity to teach the students about ecology and the importance of environmental conservation.

“It’s just a wonderful teaching tool,” Armstrong says of this undertaking.

Especially when it’s used in conjunction with their existing composting and recycling program, which has been in place at OLF for many years.

“We were able to use our own compost to support our garden and will continue to do so,” Armstrong says.

She also hopes to expand their composting program to introduce worms to one of the primary classrooms later this year.

Further environmentally conscious plans include installing barrels to collect rain water for watering purposes.

Our Lady of Fatima’s garden project is featured online at The Green Wave, a global campaign to educate children and youth about biodiversity.

“It’s such a wonderful accomplishment and it was nice see how the community could come together,” says Armstrong of the school’s commitment to be good stewards of their environment.

That community involvement was especially evident at the garden’s dedication ceremony in June, when a memorial stone donated by the Town of Renfrew in Bennett’s name was unveiled. The ceremony was attended by members of his family, the Knights of Columbus honour guard and representatives from both of Renfrew’s Catholic Women’s Leagues.

Days before the ceremony, while helping to plant one of the peonies around the flag pole, Armstrong noticed its fitting name: Everlasting Spirit. Then just before the dedication ceremony began, Mr. Bennett’s wife noticed the red geraniums and mentioned to Armstrong that they happened to be his favourite flower.

From that moment, Armstrong knew this garden was destined to do great things for the school.



A message from the Director of Education

We regularly hear messages about the environment. Whether the focus is on the clean-up of the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the latest evidence of global warming or news about species at risk or another ecological threat, media coverage on the topic is ongoing.

Our Catholic education system is also paying close attention to this important subject. The underlying message we teach our students is that our world is a gift from God, and we have a responsibility to take care of that gift.

Our RCCDSB Vision Statement expresses our view in the following way: "Open to mystery and endless discovery in the Lord, we are called to claim our role as global stewards cherishing the environment and all life in it."

We live this intention in the thoughtful decisions made at the board level and in the corporate actions we take. You will read about some of those initiatives in this issue of Notebook, including the story on page 4 about energy-saving technologies introduced in our schools and efforts on a county-wide level to reduce our environmental footprint.

But our most exciting environmental action takes the form of the projects done by our students, the concepts that are brought to life through classroom studies, and the campaigns that are undertaken by clubs and extracurricular groups.

Within these pages you will learn about school gardens, student leaders, teachers who inspire and other staff who have added their ideas and efforts to help us cherish the environment.

Personally, I find these stories a source of hope for our future. Our students are taking every opportunity to learn about the world around them and they are serious about their roles as Catholic stewards of that world.

There is much food for thought in the few examples we share here. May we all take good care of the gifts we've been given!

Michele Arbour
Director of Education

Message from the Diocese

A few weeks ago, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, made a momentous and historic visit to England and Scotland. Among the many memorable encounters of this visit was a gathering held with the children of the Catholic schools. In his reflection, the Pope reminded those gathered that the goal of every Christian is to become a saint. We are familiar with the names and lives of the saints that the Church has formally canonized, but we must remember that to become a saint is to live with God forever in heaven, which is what God desires for everyone. The Holy Father went on to say that if all of us are called to be saints, then Catholic schools have an important and privileged task. This is what he said:

In your Catholic schools, there is always a bigger picture over and above the individual subjects you study, the different skills you learn. All the work you do is placed in the context of growing in friendship with God, and all that flows from that friendship. So you learn not just to be good students, but good citizens, good people. As you move higher up the school, you have to make choices regarding the subjects you study, you

begin to specialize with a view to what you are going to do later on in life. That is right and proper. But always remember that every subject you study is part of a bigger picture. Never allow yourselves to become narrow... A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints!"

—Pope Benedict XVI, London, September 17, 2010

Growing in holiness never restricts us, rather it allows us to become more fully who God has created us to be. Striving to be a saint will never make us cold or grim, but rather will cause us to lead lives that are joy-filled, peaceful and fulfilling. Naturally, some days are more difficult than others, but God's grace and mercy is always available to guide, strengthen and protect us. Since all of us are involved in various ways in the life of our Catholic schools, may I suggest that we take these words of Pope Benedict XVI and make them our reflection for the coming year.

Father Ryan Holly

Parent Involvement Committee



The RCCDSB is embracing a new level of parental advocacy with the introduction of a formal Parent Involvement Committee (PIC).

Our former Schools Advisory Councils' Implementation Committee (SACIC), a coalition of school councils from Renfrew County, has evolved and transformed into the new PIC.

As a mom of four students—three at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Arnprior, and one beginning at St. Joseph's Catholic High School in Renfrew—I have been heavily involved with my children's school life. By serving on St. Joe's school council for the past seven years and the SACIC for three years, I feel prepared for the challenge and excitement of my duties as PIC chairperson. I know how important it is to be an advocate for your child's education, and also for all of the dedicated teachers in our family of 22 schools.

While in this development phase, we are recruiting interested parents to become members. Focusing on our schools and community, together we can work on matters that affect more than one school.

The Director of Education and our trustees will also sit on the committee and will assist in addressing issues and developing strategies to enhance our children's education.

Members of PIC will commit to approximately four meetings per year. We intend to move meeting locations around the county to encourage more participation and make it easier to accommodate everyone's needs.

From my experience working with other school councils, I appreciate how we, as parents, can band together to share ideas and discover the uniqueness of each school. United, we can evaluate the learning tools needed to achieve academic success for all students.

We are very blessed to have such a supportive school board that is always open to our questions and concerns. This is a very exciting time in our board's history and I do hope you will join me on this fantastic journey.

Stay tuned to the board's newly revamped website or your school's newsletters for further information. Anyone wanting to learn more about the committee or to participate is welcome to contact me by calling 613-623-9892.

Hazel Power
Chair, Parent Involvement Committee

Recycling wisely makes a difference at St. Casimir's

At St. Casimir's Catholic School in Round Lake, the whole community takes the three Rs of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle very seriously.

Principal David Giroux says the school community wasn't willing to wait for someone else to provide the necessary services. "We only had garbage pick-up here and that was through a contractor," he said. "There is no curbside garbage pick-up or recycling here."

Efforts to recycle depended on staff members taking items home with them. There was no school-wide way to do it. Giroux approached the board to see if the contractor who picked up the garbage could also pick up recycling at the same time.

"They agreed to do that and we bought some blue bin containers for the classrooms and areas of the school," he says.

The recycling is separated into paper products and cans, hard plastics and glass. The separated materials are then bagged and put out with the garbage for pick-up.

The school has embraced the concept wholeheartedly. Composting diverts more material from the garbage stream.

St. Casimir's Grade 2/3 students Dylon Olsheskie, Natalie Sebanc, Dakotah Cashin, Caitlyn Cowan and Maggie Hartwig enjoy lending a hand with recycling and composting in their classroom.



"We even have a member of staff who takes leftover food from the fridge to feed the birds," says the principal. "Nothing is thrown away that doesn't need to be."

These efforts mean St. Casimir's is producing as little as two bags of garbage per week.

Making positive changes like this is possible in a small school like St. Casimir's where students and staff work closely together to make things happen, Giroux notes.

Wiggling into the future of a greener school

Students at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic School in Renfrew have some wiggly little friends who like to eat their lunch leftovers.

The addition of composting worms three years ago in Ruth McNulty's grade 6 classroom has provided students with a continuous science lesson in the life cycle of food and other compostable items.



Green Team members Emma Schaly, Grade 6, and Carter Hill, Grade 4, with Teacher Ruth McNulty and their worms.

"It's quite amazing to see what they can do," McNulty says before dividing up the worms with the help of a couple of students.

The teacher has also formed a Green Team of about 35 students. One eager member, Carter Hill, loves to take care of the plants around the school. "I like to see them grow," says the keen Grade 4 student. "I like how they all become so different."

"The students all naturally want to care for the environment and now we're providing more opportunities for them to do so. Our hope is that they take these ideas and share them in their home life as well," says Principal Connie Dick.

She also commends teachers who have conveyed these messages in their communication with parents. Rebecca Holly, a Grade 6 teacher, sent suggestions for environmentally-friendly foods, requesting at least one "God made" snack of fruits and vegetables each day. A litterless lunch is not only healthier and greener, but also substantially less expensive.

A new Media Team will be working on posters and stickers that will appear throughout the school, reminding everyone of the school's green goals for the year.

Our Mission Statement

Inspired by our rich heritage and challenged by the struggles of our past, we are an inclusive Catholic educational community called to express our mission as Church to pass on the Good News of Jesus Christ, to make it relevant in the world today, and to be the hope for the future.

Solar power projects planned for three more schools

Bishop Smith Catholic High School is leading the way as an energy producer, and three more Catholic schools in the county will be following suit in the very near future.

Solar panels will be installed at St. Joseph's Catholic High School in Renfrew, Our Lady of Lourdes in Pembroke and Our Lady of Sorrows in Petawawa.

"At each school a large array of solar panels will be mounted on the roof or upper wall of the school," explains Wayne Campbell, science consultant with the RCCDSB.

These solar arrays will produce clean, renewable energy that will help reduce green house gases, smog and dependency on fossil fuels, Campbell says.

The largest array will be mounted on St. Joe's in Renfrew. It will cover 100 square meters and produce 10 kilowatts of power. The systems at Lourdes and Sorrows will each produce six kilowatts of power.

The electricity produced by these systems will be fed onto Ontario's electric grid and

purchased at a rate of 80.2 cents per kilowatt hour. The revenue will be used to support environmental initiatives within the RCCDSB.

This will also be a learning experience for students and the school community.

"Each system will be connected to the internet displaying data about energy produced, efficiency of system, carbon offset and many other factors associated with solar energy and energy consumption," Campbell says.

The technology will be integrated into the renewable energy components of the curriculum for students in grades 9 through 12.

"Jobs in the renewable energy industry will require a new set of skills, the solar arrays on our schools and the initiatives associated with them will help us, as educators, deliver those new skills," he said. "Our staff, students and buildings will be full participants in the green energy revolution!"



Owen Enright, a grade 6 student at St. Michael's Catholic School in Douglas hones his skills on some of the school board's solar equipment.

Saving energy through new technologies and plant upgrades

Saving energy, eliminating waste and using resources wisely are important at RCCDSB on a county-wide level.

With 22 schools spread across a large geographic area, there are challenges when it comes to reducing unnecessary travel or paper trails. Staff are being encouraged to use email and teleconferences or videoconferences whenever possible.

Ivan Johnson, manager of plant services, says reducing energy consumption is another priority.

"We look at windows that need replacing to more efficient windows, updating our lighting and using water efficiency devices, things like that," he says.

An exciting initiative will be the recommendations coming to the board from Trane, a company that is doing an audit of all the buildings in the board to see where energy consumption can be reduced.

"They will look at a number of things like central systems to turn the heat down and new heating and ventilation equipment," Johnson says.

"We are always working on improving things, but Trane will take it to a whole new level," he concludes.

School environmental activities round-up

Schools and school boards play a vital role in keeping the environment healthy. All RCCDSB schools are participating in one or more of the following environmental stewardship initiatives:

- recycling and composting programs
- turning lights off, turning off/powering down computers, reducing use of air conditioning to save electricity
- participating in Earth Day events (e.g., recycled art, "pitch-in" clean up of schoolyards/communities, earth-related literacy/curriculum activities, prayer services and other events to give thanks for God's bounties and our responsibilities to use them wisely)
- planting trees and flowerbeds at schools/in communities, growing/sending seedlings/saplings home for students to plant
- cleaning up/"greening" schoolyards and communities
- litterless lunches
- integrating stewardship, environmental education and respect for the environment within the curriculum
- requesting no idling of buses and other vehicles at schools
- hosting guest speakers about topics such as biodiversity and conserving energy, or taking field trips to places like the Ottawa Valley Waste Recovery Centre

Notebook

We welcome submissions to the editor.

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