

Noble Elementary diverts more than 78,000 pieces of trash from landfill

BY ERICA M. NELSON

Energy bar wrappers, empty glue sticks, worn out pens and used cell phones never go into the garbage cans at Noble Elementary School, where students and parents working together diverted more than 78,000 items from going into the landfill and raised \$1,400 for the school's new playground at the same time.

Through a program called TerraCycle, Noble staff decided to put into place schoolwide colorful trashcans featuring Capri Sun pouches, Nabisco wrappers and tape dispensers to train the entire student body around terra-cycling as opposed to tossing items into the trash.

TerraCycle's purpose is to eliminate the idea of waste by creating national recycling systems for previously non-recyclable items. With more than 14 million people collecting waste in 11 countries together it has diverted billions of pieces of waste that are either upcycled or recycled into over 1,500 various products available at retailers ranging from Walmart to Whole Foods Market.

The results of the TerraCycle program at Noble came in quickly as janitors noticed approximately two big garbage cans each day were not getting filled at lunch time. Here is a snapshot of the results for the year-long efforts. These items were all diverted from the waste stream:

- 78,000 total pieces
- 32,486 drink pouches
- 13,105 bags (or home storage containers)
- 9,583 energy bar wrappers
- 3,813 candy wrappers
- 2,587 plastic lunch kits
- 832 Colgate toothpaste tubes or brushes
- 455 writing instruments (pens)
- 583 yogurt cups.

"Our students have really gotten into the philosophy of saving the planet one piece of garbage at a time," said Manju Ramachandran, 2011-12 Noble Parent Teacher Association president. "The school has accomplished so much, and students and parents alike became very creative at increasing our TerraCycle results. We could not have succeeded so quickly without parents Telma Rangel and Season Barrientos, who run the program tirelessly."

Tom Szaky, then a 20-year-old Princeton University freshman, founded TerraCycle in 2001. It began by producing organic fertilizer, packaging liquid worm excrement in used soda bottles. Since then TerraCycle has grown into one of the fastest growing green companies in the world.

"Noble Elementary School's efforts to keep non-recyclable products and packaging out of the local landfill are fantastic," said Lauren Taylor, director of U.S. public relations for TerraCycle. "It's terrific to see

students are concerned enough about their community and the environment to take the time each day to collect, sort and send us what would normally be garbage."

Noble won TerraCycle's contest for sending in the greatest number of cheese packaging wrappers in May among all public schools in the United States.

Noble Elementary School was recognized by the City of San Jose for their work.

"I would like to take this opportunity to commend Noble School Elementary for their efforts to protect the earth and reduce the amount of waste going into our landfills," said Councilman Kansen Chu. "Noble Elementary is a shining example of environmental stewardship, demonstrating outstanding leadership in raising environmental consciousness in the City of San Jose."

The school will start the program again in August.

"We do this whether or not we earn money for our school, we are still saving the earth and teaching our children great values, and to be green every day," said Telma Rangel, one of two parents who runs the program at Noble.

For more information or to get involved with TerraCycle, visit TerraCycle.net.

Erica M. Nelson is a Noble Elementary School parent volunteer and freelance writer.

East Side high schools go solar

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help transform the Silicon Valley into a solar and sustainable energy valley. The goal now is to scale that up to the rest of the districts in the state."

Assemblymember Nora Campos, D-San Jose, highlighted the amount of money the district will be saving in order to give its students a better education.

"Teachers continue to spend hours and hours beyond the classroom to bring education to our students," she said. "And with this project teachers will

plant the seed to create more innovators and leaders here in Silicon Valley."

Kelsey Chan, a leadership student at Piedmont Hills, said she and her classmates have been striving to do anything and everything to make the school sustainable, noting a campus recycling program the student body initiated last year that is still in effect.

"We now have first-hand access to learn about energy use and solar power," she said. "When I first came to Piedmont Hills, I never thought we'd have solar panels

here. Now every time I walk into our parking lot I feel very proud."

Teresa Mayer, chief financial officer for Chevron Energy Solutions, said the company was proud to partner with the district on the program to generate savings and create a new curriculum in schools.

"It's important for the next generation of leaders to learn not only how solar works, but how it saves energy," she said. "Thanks to the team at East Side and Chevron, we're working together to make this program a reality."