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Kennedy school's students raise money for recycling bins by sorting cans, bottles out of trash

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By Dayna Straehley

To raise awareness of care for the environment, some students at a school in Norco are picking out bottles and cans from the trash to recycle. The dirty work is being done by a core group from John F. Kennedy Middle College High School's chapter of the Green Institute for Village Empowerment, Pollution Environment Awareness Conservation and Efficiency. They want to use recycling proceeds to buy recycling bins for every classroom and a few other high-traffic areas of the school on a corner of Riverside Community College's Norco campus.

The chapter, called GIVE PEACE, is the Green Institute's first on a high school campus. The institute adopted the school Oct. 23. About half of the school's more than 600 students have joined as members.

"We've raised \$150 so far, three times what last year's club raised," GIVE PEACE chapter President Mason Hernandez said.

The middle college high school allows high school students to take college classes for free. Students are treated like college students, Principal Don Ward said. Between classes they hang out or study in a campus commons and have access to teacher workrooms with photocopiers.

Hernandez and fellow students Kaylie Wilson, Brandon Him, Lauren Diaz and Jonathan Tobilla put on gloves and sort through trash after lunch twice a week and after school to get aluminum, glass and plastic bottles. Other teams collect bottles and cans on other days of the week and after school, Hernandez said.

Another student takes the bottles and cans to a recycling kiosk in the parking lot of Stater Bros. on Hamner Avenue, he said.

The recycling is a first step in the chapter's mission to raise awareness of how the way people live affects the environment and others in their community.

"It's our responsibility, of this group and eventually the whole school, to start a new drive in our area to be aware of the environment and conservation," Hernandez said.

The chapter hopes to take that message to other schools throughout the Corona-Norco Unified School District, he said.

Ward said GIVE's intention is to gather ideas for a sustainable society in which people don't use things that pollute -- in which they use metal or biodegradable forks or live and work in the same community instead of commuting.

"Recycling is the fix-it piece," Ward said. "It's a first step, but it's something we will make a habit. I want kids to start working on finding ways to do more."

In the meantime, students see the core group collecting bottles and cans.



Mark Zaleski/The Press-Enterprise
From left, Brandon Him, Lauren Diaz and Kaylie Wilson work together to collect recyclable bottles and cans that were discarded.

Some quickly gulp down the rest of their water to hand over an empty bottle.

Ward said most of the students hadn't made a habit of recycling, even if their parents did. Most other schools have recycling projects but on a smaller scale than Kennedy's, said Tom Pike, assistant superintendent for executive services.

After a class discussion last year about mercury in compact fluorescent light bulbs and how toxic it is, students wanted to start an environmental club, chemistry teacher Suenna Chang said. About that time, Ward was talking to Ali Sahabi, founder of the Green Institute and developer of Dos Lagos in Corona, and discussed collaborating.



Brandon Him and Lauren Diaz gather recyclable bottles.

"This is not really about us, but what's going to happen to them and their children and children's children," Ward said.

Reach Dayna Strahley at 951-893-2114 or dstrahley@PE.com

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