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The Planet Protection Project A student-led green club at JM

By Sophie Braccini



Painted recycling containers Photo Kim Lockett

of group gardening and composting, and trying to reduce the waste at lunchtime.

In that same spirit, Monopoli and Hunger participated in December at a joint meeting with Stanley and OIS students who want to challenge their peers to a zero-waste lunch on Earth Day in April 2010. "It was fun to see all of the eco groups from each school," says Monopoli, "A lot of other kids are aware of these questions too and that made me happy." The student noted that other interesting projects are going on in the two other local middle schools, such as a project to eliminate plastic bottles.

Social Studies teacher Hillary Hoppock accompanied the students to the meeting. "It can be challenging to convince the students to recycle," she said, "we will use the daily video bulletin and give examples of what is compostable or recyclable, and explain how to bring a zero-waste lunch."

"We hope that the children will get a consistent message at home and at school," adds Lockett, "and with the students' leadership we will make this work."

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Marissa Monopoli and Margaret Hunger are 7th graders at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School (JM) and share a passion for improving the planet. A few months ago they contacted their Science teacher, Kim Lockett, to discuss ways to reduce the use of Styrofoam in Moraga. "This material releases a lot of bad things when it comes in contact with water," says Monopoli, "Ms Lockett wanted to start a new environmental club at school, so this was a great opportunity to work together." Lockett agrees, "I wanted to see a movement stemming from the children that want to make JM greener." That's how the 3P (Planet Protection Program) club started.

The first objective of the Club, that meets every other Wednesday at lunch time, is to eliminate styrofoam from lunch leftovers. "The students made a presentation during the PTA's November meeting that was very well received," remembers Lockett, "and the PTA promised to contact the vendors that supply hot lunch at the school to ask them to eliminate Styrofoam."

The next step is to get students to recycle in the right containers. "We have separate containers for the bottles and cans but the students can be lazy and if there are not enough different cans it all gets mixed up," says Monopoli. So with the help of the teachers, the students got new containers with transparent plastic bags so the students can see what goes where, and they painted the recycling containers with bright colors to raise awareness.

"It is a matter of education," says Lockett, "most of the recycling containers are getting contaminated at lunch time and the custodians are obligated to dispose of them with the rest of the trash."

What is hopeful about this program is that many teachers are getting involved too, trying to federate the different green aspects that have been developing at JM. "We are trying to get gardening included, and to involve the 6th graders," says Core teacher Dawn Lezak." She adds that this year the students are doing more in terms