



Lunada Bay Elementary goes for the green

By Carrie Yamato, Special to the News | Posted: Thursday, April 11, 2013 7:00 am

With less than a week to go in the Los Angeles County Trash-Free Lunch Challenge, Lunada Bay Elementary School students are working hard to reduce the amount of trash in their school.

For the last four months, the students have diligently separated their lunch trash into designated bins for trash, bottles and cans, liquids, compost and recyclables; and have neatly stacked their recyclable lunch trays in piles before throwing them in the bin.

Their effort has paid off as they reduced the amount of trash from eight bags a day to one or two, and reached the finals with two other local schools — Redondo Beach's Washington Elementary and Riviera Elementary — for the \$1,000 grand prize.

“We’re doing well because everyone knows what to do and are doing it,” said fifth-grader Jack Moore, one of the school’s green ambassadors, who makes sure the students are using the correct bins.

“If our school wins, we can set up more trash cans,” Corbin Kunich added. “Its important for our school and for the earth.”

The positive attitude of making little changes to create a bigger impact is exactly what Crystal Reul-Chen had in mind when she spearheaded the program with fellow parent Anne Christmas-Dale to get her son’s school thinking more about picking up trash and recycling.

“The environment has always been a passion of mine ever since I was a child,” said Reul-Chen, who has a doctorate in environmental science and engineering. “When I saw the amount of trash at all the elementary schools, I said, ‘We need to do something about it.’”

That something included signing Lunada Bay up for the contest that was created by the nonprofit Grades of Green and educating the students and staff about the importance of sustainability.

“Recycling and the environment have always been a part of our curriculum at all levels, so this tied in really nicely with that,” Principal Nancy Parsons said. “Everyone has gotten into it.”

In addition to the countywide contest, Lunada Bay hosted their own challenge “Go Green in Lunada Bay, You are the Change” where students created a project in their home or community to help reduce, reuse and recycle.

“They really took it to the next level,” said Reul-Chen. “Someone created a blog, many did garden projects and we even had a broom made out of shredded plastic bottles. They were very creative. I was really happy.”

While it would be great to see Lunada Bay take home the \$1,000 prize, the best reward is giving the students a sense of empowerment to make the earth a little greener.

“Yeah, at first we were a little annoyed with the [recycling bins] because we were used to just throwing everything in the trashcans,” Kunich said. “But now it’s working out because we want to help the earth and environment.”

Seeing the kids’ new attitudes toward protecting the environment has made all the volunteer hours of sorting, composting and hauling bags to the recycling centers worth it for the project organizers.

“I feel confident that whatever happens with the contest, the kids will keep [the recycling] up,” said Christmas-Dale, who with Reul Chen have averaged about 20 hours a week helping the students. “It’s ingrained in them now, and they know why they’re doing it.”

“They’re saving resources for themselves,” Reul-Chen added. “It’s a basic real important concept and I’m so excited to see the movement grow.”

A panel of five environmental experts will visit the three schools on April 16 to declare a winner. So far, all three finalists have cut their landfill trash by 90 percent.

Carrie Yamato’s column on Peninsula elementary schools is featured on the second week of the month. If you have a story about your child’s school, email her at carrieyamato@me.com.