

## Green-minded students put a fork in 'sporks'

by Anna Mavromati

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For most of the elementary schools in Redondo Beach, sporks are now a thing of the past.

A spork ban is one of several efforts made by local elementary schools, including Jefferson, Madison and Alta Vista, to divert waste. Grades of Green, a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching K-12 and pre-school students to become more environmentally aware, helped Redondo schools organize the ban on spork packets. They are also hosting several other programs that encourage the students to live greener lifestyles.



Mayor Mike Gin honored student representatives of the elementary schools Jefferson, Alta Vista, Lincoln, Madison, and Coastal Christian Academy with certificates at the June 5 City Council meeting in recognition of their efforts to make their schools greener.

"Oftentimes the kids come home and they teach us adults," Gin said.

Among Grades of Green's programs at South Bay elementary schools are No-Trash Tuesdays, when students are encouraged to bring reusable containers and utensils to school for lunch; Walking School Buses or Walk-to-School-Wednesdays, when volunteer parents walk children to school; the introduction of composting to the campuses, sponsored by Athens Services; and of course, the spork ban that started at Jefferson Elementary.

"It created a bigger snowball and Alta Vista in Redondo started banning the spork packages and then Madison in Redondo," said Emily Gee, programs and marketing coordinator for Grades of Green. "Now the next step may be to ban it district-wide."

A spork packet is made up of a spork (the plastic spoon-fork combination), napkins and a plastic straw "that nobody uses" says Grades of Green Program Manager Nicole Sevier. The packets are also wrapped in a plastic container.

Through the various efforts to reduce waste at lunchtime, Gee said that schools not only prevent more garbage from piling up in landfills, but they also save money by buying fewer trash bin liners. Gee said Jefferson Elementary is expected to have saved over \$700 in trash bin liners this school year.

Since adopting Grades of Green's trash-diverting methods, Jefferson has gone from disposing of 16 bags of garbage from lunchtime every day to only two bags. Alta Vista went from over 20 bags to four, and Madison from 10 to two.

"Once they talk about banning the spork packages and how much trash they divert in the schools their hope is that other schools will see this and try to make a cooperative effort to ban it in the district," Gee said.

The organization was established in 2009 by parents at Grand View Elementary in Manhattan Beach. The four mothers who founded the nonprofit continue to act as the organization's directors, Programs and Outreach Coordinator Allie Bussjaeger said.

The organization's website, which Gee said has about 70 thousand schools from across the country -

as well as some from Australia, Malaysia and Canada - registered on it, launched on Earth Day in 2010.

"We started in the South Bay but we're really trying to expand and make sure that other parts in other states have the opportunity to divert trash as well," Gee said.

Gee and Bussjaeger both said one of the main goals of the program is to find ways to make green efforts fun for the kids.

"We try to make everything a game they can do with their friends," Bussjaeger said.

The elementary school students sat scattered throughout the council chambers at Redondo Beach City Hall, awaiting their recognition from the mayor and group photo that night.

"They're so proud," said Karla Heinrich, principal of Jefferson Elementary. "They're proud of having a clean campus."

Jody Smith, 9, said she and her friends are active members of the "Green Team" at Madison Elementary, which is hosted by Grades of Green.

"I really like helping the environment," Jody said. "I have ever since I was a little kid."

"I'm just so proud of these kids," Sevier said. "They're doing this every day. It's just so great to see the kids being involved and being inspired."