

Holmes School Celebrates Zero Waste Efforts

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Holmes Zero Waste Ambassadors Thomas Wolfe and Evelyn Jurado demonstrate how the school's new Earth Tub works.

On Tuesday, October 13, students, parents, staff and local community leaders gathered at Holmes School to celebrate the final phase of its year-long Zero Waste program. After receiving grants in spring 2008 from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Oak Park/River Forest Community Foundation and the Lumpkin Foundation, Holmes teamed up with its PTO and Seven Generations Ahead, a local, non-profit sustainability group, to implement a number of initiatives aimed at moving the school toward zero waste status. These initiatives included establishing a re-usable lunchroom featuring the use of re-usable trays and silverware that get washed each day in an industrial dishwasher; and performing vermicomposting with worms.

The celebration on Tuesday highlighted two of the school's other significant greening initiatives: planting an organic garden and installing an Earth Tub composter. During a ceremony held in the school's courtyard, students unveiled a sign featuring the new name for the garden. "The Holmes Garden: Where We Grow Together" was the winning entry submitted by Holmes student Maddie Lebovitz in conjunction with a school-wide garden-naming contest. The school also cut the ribbon on its new Earth Tub, which will convert solid food waste from the lunchroom into compost and divert more than 10,000 pounds of food scraps from the landfill on an annual basis.

Holmes Principal Suzie Hackmiller presided over the event with assistance from the school's 5th Grade Zero Waste Ambassadors: Tino Dzwairo, Grace Irving, Shahar Dahari, Mira Rauch, Ella Rossa, Thomas Wolfe, Isaiah Janota, Katy Schuller, Mary Blankemeier, Evelyn Jurado, Sophia Zinger, Grant Reynolds and Thida Wagner. Also in attendance were Oak Park Village Board President David Pope, District 97 Superintendent Constance Collins and Gary Cuneen, executive director of Seven Generations Ahead.

Later that evening, more than 250 members of the Holmes community gathered in their lunchroom for the school's first annual Harvest Dinner, which was prepared by Chef Leonard from the Marion Street Cheese Market. The meal was comprised of pasta dishes and salad that featured tomatoes, basil and Swiss chard harvested from the school garden.

Michelle Vanderlaan, former president of the Holmes PTO and co-writer of the school's Zero Waste Grant requests, said of the occasion, "This was a terrific day of celebration for moving Holmes School towards a

Zero Waste status. This serves as a launching point for Holmes and as a benchmark for other schools in the district that are now initiating similar programs.”

On October 9, six other District 97 schools (Beye, Hatch, Lincoln, Longfellow, Mann and Whittier) were among the 29 schools in the state that were awarded Zero Waste School Grants by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.