

# ONEIDA-HERKIMER SOLID WASTE AUTHORITY

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## **PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Winners of the Oneida Herkimer Solid Waste Authority's Zero Waste Lunch Challenge**

The Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority sponsored its third annual Zero Waste Lunch Challenge for all public and private K-12 school buildings in Oneida and Herkimer Counties.

The purpose of the Zero Waste Lunch Challenge was to demonstrate how students can reduce the amount of waste they produce. Thirteen school buildings from Oneida and Herkimer Counties participated. In preparation for the Challenge, students were educated about ways to reduce the amount of lunch waste they produce and reviewed daily recycling guidelines through holding assemblies, classroom presentations, and informational displays throughout the schools. Although the Zero Waste Lunch Challenge was only based on one day, many schools are taking waste reduction efforts and implementing them daily, such as composting efforts and using silverware instead of plastic ware. The schools that participated reduced their amount of cafeteria waste by over 50%, and some by over 75%. "It has been amazing to see the significant reduction in cafeteria waste that schools have achieved through their efforts," said Jamie Tuttle, Authority School Recycling Coordinator. "The Zero Waste Lunch Challenge was an opportunity to urge schools to instill daily changes for reducing waste in the cafeteria, and it has been a great success," continued Tuttle.

The thirteen participating schools were:

1. E.R. Hughes Elementary School – New Hartford Central School District
2. Gansevoort Elementary School – Rome City School District
3. General William Floyd Elementary School – Holland Patent Central School District
4. Harts Hill Elementary School- Whitesboro Central School District
5. Holland Patent Middle School
6. Jones Elementary School – Utica City School District
7. Marcy Elementary School – Whitesboro Central School District
8. New York Mills Elementary School
9. Sauquoit Valley Elementary School
10. Sauquoit Valley Middle School
11. Staley Upper Elementary School – Rome City School District
12. West Leyden Elementary School – Adirondack Central School District
13. Whitesboro Middle School

The elementary school building with the lowest percentage of lunchtime waste per student on the day of the Challenge was Harts Hill Elementary School of the Whitesboro School District. The Authority will award Harts Hill Elementary School with the grand prize, which will be presentations from the Utica Zoo's "Zoomobile." With 365 students, Harts Hill Elementary produced an average of 80 pounds of lunchtime waste every day before the Challenge (that equals over 7 tons per school year). On the day of the Challenge, Harts Hill only produced an astonishing 2 pounds of cafeteria waste! Beyond the obvious conservation of materials and landfill space, if this rate were sustained, the school would save over \$500.00 annually. "This is a perfect example of how students can make a huge difference with a few small actions. I look forward to following up with schools in the weeks to come to see the lasting changes that were made through promoting waste reduction awareness," said Tuttle.

For the second year in a row, the middle school building with the lowest percentage of lunchtime waste per student was Sauquoit Valley Middle School. With 320 students, Sauquoit Valley Middle School produced only 1.5 pounds of cafeteria garbage! In addition to recycling paper, plastic, metal and glass, Sauquoit also participates in TerraCycle—a program that provides a recycling outlet for otherwise difficult to recycle items, are able to recycle all of their Capri Sun juice pouches and Frito Lay chip wrappers. The food waste collected during the Zero Waste Lunch was collected by Green Team students who are composting it on-site for use in the elementary school's

garden. Sauquoit Valley Middle School will be awarded the grand prize, which will be appearances from the KISS FM DJs for a live, remote radio broadcast.

In addition, both winning schools' Green Teams will be awarded tours of the Authority's Single Stream Recycling Center with all transportation costs paid by the Authority.

With strong efforts from Harts Hill Elementary School's Principal, Lisa Putnam, teacher aide Erin Huggins and their fourth and fifth grade Green Team, Sauquoit Valley Middle School's teachers, Jennifer Zuroweste and Sara Piacentino-Call, and their middle school Green Team, the student body, parents, custodians, and cafeteria staff, these schools made significant impacts on the amount of cafeteria waste produced. Both schools continue to expand their recycling programs and students in both schools are reminded regularly of waste reducing strategies to use during lunchtime as well as in other aspects of daily life through various "green" initiatives.

The Authority would also like to acknowledge Holland Patent Middle School for their outstanding efforts over the past 3 years of the Challenge. Thanks to the Green Team's effort, enthusiasm and hard work, 345 Holland Patent Middle School students only produced 2 pounds of trash during their Zero Waste Lunch.

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