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Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority Announces

Winners of the 4th Annual Zero Waste Lunch Challenge

The Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority sponsored its fourth 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. Twelve 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 and cafeteria 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 food waste 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 Challenge was an opportunity to urge schools to instill daily changes for reducing waste as well as a lesson to teach students that if we all make a few small changes, we can have a significant impact," continued Tuttle.

The twelve participating schools were:

1. Central Valley Academy – Central Valley School District
2. Harts Hill Elementary School – Whitesboro Central School District
3. Holland Patent Elementary School – Holland Patent Central School District
4. Holland Patent Middle School – Holland Patent Central School District
5. Jarvis Middle School – Central Valley School District
6. John F. Kennedy Middle School – Utica City School District
7. Louis V. Denti Elementary School – Rome City School District
8. Sauquoit Valley Elementary School – Sauquoit Valley Central School District
9. Sauquoit Valley Middle School – Sauquoit Valley Central School District
10. Staley Upper Elementary School – Rome City School District
11. Utica Academy of Science Charter School
12. Whitesboro Middle School – Whitesboro Central School District

The elementary school with the lowest percentage of lunchtime waste per student on the day of the Challenge was Louis V. Denti Elementary School of the Rome City School District. The Authority will award Louis V. Denti Elementary School with the grand prize, which will be presentations from the Utica Zoo's "Zoomobile." During lunch on the days before the Challenge, Denti Elementary School produced an average of 170 pounds of

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lunchtime waste with approximately 500 students present (that equals over 14 tons of garbage per school year). On the day of the Challenge, Denti produced an astonishing 0.4 pounds of garbage during all of the lunch periods! Beyond the obvious conservation of materials and landfill space, if this rate were sustained, the school would save over \$1,000.00 annually. "This is a perfect example of how students can make a huge difference with a few small actions, such as packing reusable and recyclable items in their lunches. 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 and awareness," said Tuttle.

The middle school building with the lowest percentage of lunchtime waste per student was Holland Patent Middle School. With 313 students in attendance, Holland Patent Middle School produced only 2 pounds of cafeteria garbage! In addition to recycling paper, plastic, milk cartons, metal and glass, Holland Patent also participates in the Authority's food waste composting program. During the Zero Waste Lunch, individual students stepped outside the cafeteria door and placed their leftover food scraps directly into the school's composting unit. Once the food scraps are composted, the finished compost will be used in the Middle School's garden. Holland Patent 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 Louis V. Denti Elementary School's Principal Sherry Lubey, Denti Green Team Leaders Eileen Woodcock and Megan Barber and their Green Team, Holland Patent Middle School's Principal Charles Pratt, Holland Patent Green Team Leader and science teacher Stacey Smith and their Green Team, the student body, parents, custodians, and cafeteria staff, these schools have 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 Harts Hill Elementary School and John F. Kennedy Middle School for their outstanding efforts in this year's Challenge. Thanks to the Green Team's effort, enthusiasm and hard work, with 341 students, Harts Hill Elementary produced just 0.5 pounds of garbage during their Zero Waste Lunch and John F. Kennedy Middle School produced only 4.5 pounds of garbage with over 600 students in attendance during the lunch periods.

For more information on the Authority's School Recycling Program, contact Jamie Tuttle, School Recycling Coordinator, at (315) 733-1224 ext. 2300 or visit www.ourgreenteam.org to download the **School Recycling Program Guide**.

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