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Walkersville, Thurmont schools among dozens recognized as 'green'

By Jeremy Hauck | Staff Writer

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Walkersville High School biology teacher Amber McCauley's AP biology students shoveled rocky, red-and-brown soil around the base of a new pine oak sapling in a memorial garden in front of the school. The students patted the soil down and watered it with blue-tinged potting mix poured from recycled laundry detergent containers, causing bubbly foam to rise around the tree.

The garden contains a yard of trees and separates a staff parking lot from the school's entrance drive.

Barry Burch, the school's transition education coordinator, replaced a memorial plaque in the dirt. It read, "In loving memory, Jody Crum, class of 2006, Feb. 25, 1988, May 26, 2006."

Burch and McCauley, along with fellow teachers Sue Faibisch, Scott McIntosh, Tony Williams and Becky Reickel were instrumental this year in putting together a successful application to receive the Maryland Green Schools certification from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources [DNR]. Walkersville High joined Walkersville Elementary School, located next door, in winning the award, along with 64 other schools in Maryland, according to a press release.

The two schools share a backyard on Walkersville's West Frederick Street, and environmental lessons carry over from school to school.

"The folks that give the awards said that really stood out," said Faibisch, who teaches AP environmental science.

Thurmont Middle School was recertified for the second time for the program last week.

Schools become Maryland Green Schools by teaching students environmental stewardship. The program started in 1999. Schools who receive recognition from the state can fly a flag of the state against a field of green, according to the press release.

Environmental lessons at green schools include all subject areas. Students employ resource conservation practices on school grounds and join environmental projects in the greater community.

At Walkersville High, Burch and McCauley demonstrated the extent to which the school has emphasized acting on the growing impulse to go green. Students, teachers and community members have over two years planted a string of young trees stretching along a fully grown tree line bordering the school's property. Some of the trees came from the Potomac Conservancy and some came from the American Chestnut Foundation.

“That’s the focus here, was native species. They attract things that are supposed to be here,” McCauley said. “We’re probably up to around 200 [young trees planted] at this point.”

Two compost bins built by students out of discarded pallets stand behind the school building.

The school has also received two grants from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, for a total of about \$5,000, the teachers said. They added that an outdoor classroom with amphitheatre seating at the edge of the school property is in the planning stages.

Burch said Walkersville High has reduced its electricity consumption by 5 percent over the year. Next year, the school will weigh the amount of goods it recycles, he said.

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