

Mt. Madonna holds environmental festival

Pajaro River endangerment part of yearlong curriculum

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FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Sitting on a ridge straddling two watersheds, Mount Madonna School is in a unique position to look at water issues from above. This private K-12 school of 180 students serves students from both sides of the hill — Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito and Monterey counties.

When students and faculty discovered last year that the Pajaro River is the most endangered in the country, they took notice. The students embarked on a year of discovery about how the river became so endangered and what could be

done about it. The school decided to create an all-school, yearlong curriculum based on the Pajaro Watershed.

This theme is reflected across the curriculum, from math and science to language arts and social studies.

The culmination of this thematic curriculum was the Environmental Awareness Festival: Celebrating the Pajaro Watershed, held Friday.

Students, families and community members were invited to hear presentations, visit activity and demonstration stations and take part in a creative educational ex-

perience.

Principal Sarada Diffenbaugh explained the three pillars of their educational philosophy: Positive character development, creative self-expression and academic excellence.

These pillars were demonstrated by the student involvement in this festival.

They opened the program with keynote speaker Lois Robin, a veteran Sierra Club activist from Santa Cruz.

She discussed environmental degradation, the damage done by

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Mount Madonna student during the Environmental

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FESTIVAL

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an automobile society and the lack of children's access to natural places.

Then, visitors and students visited several presentations.

The elementary students had environmental exhibits set up in the library. David Collier from the Sierra Club discussed flooding, water supply and quality and how some species, such as Steelhead, have almost disappeared from the river.

Tom AmRhein covered agriculture and water in the Pajaro Valley.

Representatives from BOA Construction explained natural building and solar alternatives, and Jim Curland presented a slide show about otters.

After a snack break, students and families did a rotation through 10 activity and demonstration stations.

Apex Solar, Elkhorn Slough, Save Our Shores and the Monterey Bay Aquarium were represented.

Some demonstrations were student projects, such as the 12th-grade biodiesel project. After watching "An Inconvenient Truth," the senior class did a presentation and proposal for school administrators and convinced them to switch to biodiesel.

Starting the beginning of May,

the two school buses and the dump trucks will use biodiesel. Weston Miller, a middle and high school science teacher, led his classes through this conversion, and is proud of the work and commitment of his students.

The eighth-graders have created some professional quality science and ecology videos, which can be viewed on the Web at www.youtube.com/profile?user=rjmsscience8.

Elementary students were using a watershed model to show other children how pollution drains to our rivers and to the bay.

Lara Kilpatrick, the assistant director of admissions and one of the organizers of the event, was one of the first graduates of Mount Madonna, and now her daughter, Vyvanne Mackey, is a sixth-grader at the school.

Sophomore Patricia Sosa said she knew nothing about the Pajaro River until her ninth-grade biology class.

She has become knowledgeable and active during this last year. She said that while most presentations put her to sleep, she found AmRhein's talk on agriculture very interesting.

Kindergartner Kayley Stanlon was one of the Hawaiian dancers and she has learned a lot about water and plants this year.

The festival ended with lunch and a final presentation by Matt Lappé on Climate Change.

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