

'Around the World' in recyclable boats

Students sail bay in vessels made from old bottles

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Rusty Cocuzza, 6, of Keansburg, left in boat, floats along as Annabel Winchell, 13, of Keyport, right, paddles, while riding inside the Buffalo Hyde Boat as The New School of Monmouth County, holds its 18th Annual Boat Day Event at the Spy House Beach in Port Monmouth, Tuesday, September 27, 2011. Students from the school create the boats from recycled materials then put them to the test as they set sail on Raritan Bay with the help of teachers and parents.

About 80 people witnessed hundreds of plastic bottles and milk cartons floating in the Raritan Bay near the shoreline on Tuesday afternoon.

The culprits who put the recyclables in the bay near the Bayshore Waterfront Park area in the Port Monmouth section of Middletown also were at the scene. They were students of The New School of Monmouth County in Holmdel participating in the school's "Around the World"-themed boat day. The school has conducted the program with a different theme for nearly 20 years.

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"I call this 'Around the World in 80 Bottles,' " said Heather Chibnik, 10, a fifth-grader from Middletown.

About 11:45 a.m., the students put on life jackets to launch boats they had constructed from recyclables. Each vessel was manned by two to three students and had a tow rope. Parents of the students volunteered to go into the water and serve as barge mules.

Heather and 40 other students from the private, nonprofit kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school participated. The lessons learned included teamwork, science, the environment and of course, mathematics, said Susan Chilvers, founder and educational director of the school.

The “around the world” theme consisted of the students learning about the types of boats used in different countries.

The boats for this event were patterned after a wide variety of vessels, including a buffalo hide boat from Africa, a houseboat from India, a gondola from Italy, a flat-bottom canoe from the United States, a racing boat from Japan and a sailboat from Madagascar. Each group consisted of two students each from the little, middle and older classes. The little class consists of kindergarten through second grade, the middle class is third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students and the older class is grades six to eight.

Esteban Fuentes, 9, a fourth-grader from the Lincroft section of Middletown, said his group considered building a boat called the Titanic. But after pondering the real Titanic’s fate, they went with their second idea, a gondola.

“I searched the encyclopedia for gondolas,” Esteban said.

And, with a lot of duct tape, plastic bottles and the imagination of five other students in his group, their gondola was made seaworthy, as were the other six boats.

The event is not a competition, Chilvers said. The program allows the students to interact with all the students of the school while learning through designing a boat.

Timothy Puntis, Chilvers’ cousin from Scotland, said he has always wanted to visit his cousin for boat day.

Puntis also volunteered to walk the boats in waist-high water.

“I have wanted to do this for years,” he said. “This is totally brilliant.”

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Annaliese Heidelberger, 7, of Middletown, waves her hands as Kylee Wood, 12, of Atlantic Highlands, behind, looks on. The New School of Monmouth County, holds its 18th Annual Boat Day Event at the Spy House Beach in Port Monmouth, Tuesday, September 27, 2011. Students from the school create the boats from recycled materials then put them to the test as they set sail on Raritan Bay with the help of teachers and parents. PHOTOGRAPHER/MARY FRANK - MIDDLETOWN - NEWS- 09/27/11. / MARY FRANK