

Composting for a brighter future

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Jeanette Tillman of South Tahoe Refuse presents Parents club president Jessica Schnoll and Club member Erinn Miller with a sustainability award.
 Provided/Ashleigh Goodwin Tahoe Daily Tribune

ZEPHYR COVE, Nev. — During Zephyr Cove Elementary School's back to school night, South Tahoe Refuse recognized the [parent's club](#) with an award for the work it put into to start, manage and, now, expand a contamination free composting project.

In 2019, the pilot program was launched thanks to a \$5,000 grant from Douglas County Community Grants Program. Leftover funds remaining from a donation in 2018 by the late Angel of Tahoe, Lisa Maloff, allows the campus to not only boast a set of grow domes but a whole new outdoor classroom. The grow domes and STEM inspired curriculum helps children learn about sustainability, hydroponics, and agriculture.

Jeanette Tillman, sustainability manager of South Tahoe Refuse attended back to school night to present the award.



Tillman told the Tribune, "Jess was a force that would not be told no," she said.

Tillman said despite the many naysayers the president of the parents club, Jessica Schnoll, put in the work to make composting a reality for ZCES.

"We are proud of the results from the 12-week pilot program. We collected a grand total of just over 3,500 pounds of food waste, with an average collection of 322 pounds per week," Schnoll said. "The program laid an important framework for South Tahoe Refuse regarding the future of residential composting programs. This project has shown that local composting is possible, and the demand is present and growing."

The dedication of the volunteers to the project has allowed for the program to continue long past the last day of the pilot in June, 2022. One member of the parent club, Erinn Miller, said she was out bright and early every Thursday at the bin each week. Miller said the number one need for the program is more volunteers.

An additional problem has been illegal dumping. While the bin is locked and clearly labeled "FOOD ONLY" Schnoll said often trash bags are found on top of the bin. The most effective way to keep contamination at zero is to have the bins staffed.



A bucket of food waste is deposited into the "FOOD ONLY" container for composting.
Provided/Erinn Miller

In the event a composting bin becomes contaminated a fee is assessed and it would be diverted to the general dump instead of composting. The diligence of the volunteers translates directly to money saved. In fact there was enough left over to pay for bin service the remainder of the calendar year.

The project itself further proves to be sustainable, the compost now helps the students' plants flourish.

Schnoll said "Thanks to a generous donation from Full Circle Compost, we were provided with 25 bags of their incredible soil for our raised garden beds and to amend the current soil in the grow domes."

"We offered food waste drop-off two times per week; on Mondays from 3-4 p.m. and Thursdays from 7-9 a.m.," she continued. "Between March 31 and June 9, we collected food waste for a total of 19 days. Sixty-Two percent of our participants dropped off food waste at least five times or more. The food waste diverted from the landfill to a proper composting facility has resulted in a reduction of approximately 290 pounds of methane gas production, positively benefiting the environment of our community."



Erinn Miler, Meghan Burk and Rika Ryan collection volunteers for ZCES Parents Club composting program.
Provided/Erinn Miller

The more food waste composted allows for greater benefits to the environment. The parent's club is eager to open the program to community members but first require more volunteers to man the bin. To volunteer, email zcesparentsclub@gmail.com.

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