

ESSEX NEWS DAILY

Middle school students clean the parks

Some students are surprised by the trash they find as they work to give back to Nutley

By: Peter Fiorilla - Staff Writer



Photos By Peter Fiorilla

Students from John H. Walker Middle School pitched in for their community by helping clean up the local parks. Students split into teams and tackled three parks in town, cleaning up much more garbage than anyone expected to find. Some students were even surprised by the type of garbage they found, like a tire.

NUTLEY, NJ — Students at John H. Walker swarmed over The Oval at Tangorra Field, Yanticaw Park and Memorial Park under a mid-morning sun, leaving no stone unturned or blade of grass uninspected.

To many of the 450 students on-hand, the green fields and parks had looked pristine to begin with. But outfitted with cotton gloves and trash bags, and in conjunction with the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, they uncovered bag after bag of trash at John H. Walker's second annual park clean-up.

"They had fun and they're doing something great for the environment. They're cleaning up the parks. They're protecting their local community. I think at their age level, it's important that they get out there and do something like this," said Lynn Zazzali, a science teacher who helped organize the clean-up. "I have kids coming up to me, saying 'I can't believe I'm finding this out here,' so it's a good thing that they participate in an event like this. Especially at the end of the school year."

Students were given the opportunity to volunteer in the clean-up, which was held during school hours on Wednesday, June 17. They found four-and-a-half cubic yards of trash, according to the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, as they removed floatables, vegetation, recyclables and other debris from the parks.

Most of the items were small and hard to see, like plastic straws and cups, while others were easier to spot. One group of students found a tire.

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“I just like that we get to go outside and help out our towns to be the best that they can be,” said Emily DeAngelo, an eighth-grader who added that much of the trash was at Memorial Park. “It wasn’t that much. There wasn’t a lot at the school. It was probably more at the park.”

The event was so popular, according to principal Tracy Egan, that almost all of the students at John H. Walker signed up for it.

Once outside, under the sun instead of a classroom ceiling, students were split into designated groups and set out to comb the parks.

“Moving into the middle school model this year, kids are put into teams. And they learning about how to take pride in their schools and their community,” said Egan. “Each grade has three different groups, and they’re each named after a street in Nutley. The idea is that all roads lead to success.”

The idea for the cleanup was conceived about five years ago, said Zazzali, when the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission approached the school for a one-time event. It was so popular, added Zazzali, that it’s now becoming a yearly tradition.

“We did a cleanup about five years back, and it was 100 students. It was the first 100 students who handed in their permission slips, or something like that, because it was so popular. When Miss Egan became the principal, she said why don’t we just do the whole school?” said Zazzali. “It is a great opportunity, this is a nice culminating activity for the kids.”

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