

Area students celebrate Earth Day events

By Sean McNamara
Freelance writer

ROCHESTER — "A new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge which, rather than being downplayed, ought to be encouraged to develop into concrete programs and initiatives," Pope John Paul II declared in his Jan. 1 message, "Peace With God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation."

Students in the Diocese of Rochester, along with millions of others around the globe, will put the pope's words into action April 22 as they join together to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Earth Day.

Special classes, clean-up efforts, tree plantings and pollution-awareness seminars are just some of the activities diocesan schools have planned to commemorate Earth Day.

Founded by the National Wildlife Foundation on April 22, 1970, Earth Day is designed to encourage people to clean up pollution, promote recycling, and save plants and animals from extinction.

"I think it's important that students are involved in Earth Day because they are the future caretakers of the earth," said Kristine Stevens, director of Rochester Earth Day 1990. "We need to get them the information to do a good job."

Many of the students participating in Earth Day 1990 are children of parents who participated in the 1970 event. Moreover, Stevens said, student involvement "is a combination of the children being willing and ready to take the responsibility for the environment and the encouragement of their parents."

Rochester Catholic schools are involved "through discussions on preventing pollution, cleaning up school grounds (and) learning to recycle. Students are learning the importance of living in a healthy environment," said a statement from Brother Brian Walsh, CFC, diocesan superintendent of Catholic schools.

Students at Holy Cross, St. Stanislaus, St. Andrew's and Holy Ghost schools will clean the school grounds, while students at St. John the Evangelist, St. Thomas the Apostle, Holy Rosary and Nativity of the



A stand of pine trees on the grounds of the former Cardinal Mooney High School provides a living reminder of activities that took place on the first Earth Day. *Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer*

Blessed Virgin Mary will plant trees as part of classroom lessons on ecology and the environment.

At Blessed Trinity and St. Mary's Schools in Auburn, Holy Family Junior High School in Elmira, St. Louis School in Pittsford, St. Michael's School in Penn Yan, and St. Patrick's School in Owego, special classes will focus on such topics as rain forests, composting and recycling, and pollution prevention.

Meanwhile, Stevens said, students from a number of local high schools will participate in an "Ecofair" to be held at Monroe Community College. More than 100 environmental groups and environmentally concerned companies will be on hand to discuss their efforts. Free tree seedlings are to be given out to students to plant at home, Stevens said.

Tree planting is one of the principal activities planned for this year's Earth Day, as it was 20 years ago.

In Czechoslovakia, 50,000 school children will plant trees in a valley made barren by sulfuric emissions. President Vaclav Havel intends to plant the first tree, and the pope will bless the event.

Closer to home, Aquinas Institute will participate in Monroe County's tree-planting efforts. Twenty years ago, Patte Bittner, now an environmental activist, planted trees at the former Cardinal Mooney High School. The trees she helped plant still stand as a reminder of the begin-

nings of her environmental activism, Bittner said.

While Earth Day has been celebrated intermittently since its inception, this year marks the first coordinated effort to take place in 20 years. Stevens explained that people are more interested in the environment today than they have been in recent years because environmental issues are now affecting people where they live.

"The issues, the size and scope of (environmental problems) is here and now and in our own yard. It's part of the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome. It's coming down to everybody's back yard,"

Notre Dame High School

Do you think society places enough emphasis on preserving the environment?

Rick Shaw, junior:

Personally, I feel more importance is being placed on arms and foreign policy, rather than on (an) equally important issue — the environment. Our government should enforce more stringent regulations regarding industrial waste.



Jenny Fagan, junior:

I feel that there is definitely not enough importance placed on our environment today. Unfortunately, there has been little effective effort in the past. Until the politicians are able to place serious restrictions on industrial air pollution discharges, we will be left with continued ineffectual studies regarding acid rain.



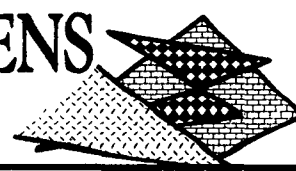
Stevens explained.

Ironically, the local success of this year's Earth Day will depend on environmental factors — the weather, Stevens said. Poor weather could mean a low turnout for several outdoor events.

In addition to the threat of inclement weather, organizers also fear that once Earth Day is over, public attention will shift away from environmental concerns.

"Immediately, you'll see well-cleaned communities, more trees and more people pausing to consider decisions," she observed, "but after that it will be hard to tell."

AS TEENS SEE IT



Brian Sheehan, junior:

I think that our environment is being destroyed, and there isn't enough being done about it. The public continues to be careless in discarding of garbage. Industries contaminate our drinking water and pollute our air by using improper disposal methods like landfills and ocean dumping. On top of it all, our government can't come up with any solid enforceable laws to keep the nation clean.



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