

MARLBOROUGH ENTERPRISE

Pay for Play: Students win grant for recess project

By Mary Wenzel

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MARLBOROUGH - When the fourth and fifth graders at the Marlborough 4-7 School gathered for a National Green Week assembly, they were told that there would be a surprise at the end.

Following student presentations about recycling, plastic bags and plans for Green Week activities, five students from the fifth grade class of Trish O'Malley took to the stage to unveil the surprise, but first they had a question

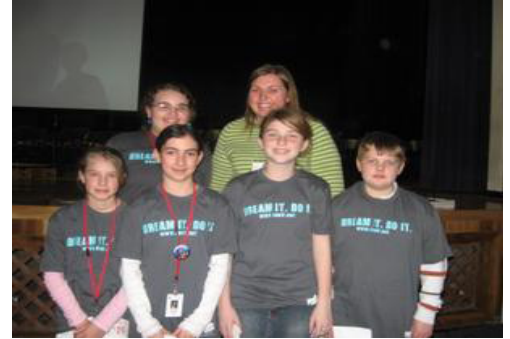
"Do you want more homework?" they asked their classmates.

A resounding "NO" was followed by, "Well that's good because we don't want anymore either. The real question is do you want more recess equipment?"

An enthusiastic "YES" from the audience was just the right answer.

"Well good because that's exactly what we got you," Elizabeth Duross, Max Shepherd, Samantha Vaccaro, Ashley Desko and Sherley Ragan told their classmates.

During the past few months a project had been underway by this team of students in order to apply for a grant. "The project is about getting recess equipment for our school which is needed," explained Elizabeth Duross, one of the students. "We feel this is important because there is not a lot of recess equipment for the children to play with and the teachers have to purchase equipment with their own money."



Students who wrote the grant for the project are, in front, Ashley Desko, Elizabeth Duross, Samantha Vaccaro and Max Shepherd. In back are student Sherley Ragan and Robyn McLaughlin, Youth Venture/United Way.

A program called Youth Venture/United Way gave the students an opportunity to fill out an application with ideas and to research information for community service projects. "We presented our ideas to our teacher, assistant principal, the mayor's assistant, Youth Venture leaders and people from United Way," said Duross. The selection panel that listened to the presentation of the project unanimously decided to award the team a \$1,000 Youth Venture grant.

"We are so proud of these young people," stated Robyn McLaughlin, the United Way of Tri-County's Youth Venture coordinator. "I'm not surprised that they are so thoughtful and precise in their efforts to help themselves and their peers. The class has a terrific teacher, Trish O'Malley, and with her help and the support of the administration, we hope more students will consider starting youth-led social change initiatives."

The presentation was well received, allowing the group to continue to work towards the goal. "Because they want us to proceed they are granting us \$1,000 to purchase the recess equipment needed," said Duross.

While recess is a valuable time for most elementary students, not all schools have sufficient equipment. "Kids just sit around and wait for other kids to finish using equipment," said Sam Vaccaro, one of the students. "We really think this idea is going to get kids more active."

"Recess for All," as the project is called, is expected to provide money to purchase new basketballs, soccer balls, kick-balls, Frisbees, jump ropes and a ball pump, as well as other equipment.

"When students are active, they are healthier and there are fewer disciplinary challenges," said Emily Murphy, assistant principal at the Marlborough Intermediate Elementary School.

The new equipment, in order to last, needs to be taken care of, the student team cautioned. "First, when you take a ball out of the bins that you will soon find in the entrance to your cafeterias, you must put it back in the bin it came from," they said.

The criteria for starting a United Way Venture Team is that: must be a new club, service, or organization; provide a positive, lasting community benefit; be created, run, and managed by youth ages 12-20; have clear goals, a committed team, a realistic budget; and have a non-controlling adult mentor. Each Team receives up to \$1,000 in Venture seed funding.

For more information about "Recess for All," contact McLaughlin at 508-872-3291, extension 58, or visit the website www.uwotc.org.