

The Telegraph

Article published May 14, 2007

Merrimack students praised for biodiesel bus

By [Steve Bodnar](#)
Telegraph Staff

When a group of Merrimack High School students attended an afternoon banquet for youth leaders, they arrived to the event in environmentally conscious style. The group's mode of travel was a large blue school bus that runs on biodiesel fuel. This group of motivated "change makers" called the Merrimack Biodiesel Crew took part in the United Way-Youth Venture year-end celebration at the Colonial Hotel in Gardner, Mass., on Thursday.

The event brought together high school and middle-school students from Greater Nashua and north-central Massachusetts who are positively affecting their communities by initiating social change through a variety of projects or "Ventures."

The Biodiesel Crew was invited to United Way-Youth Venture because of their effort to create an environmentally friendly vehicle – an example of the many creative and beneficiary projects that students lead in their communities.

The crew was also featured during a Web site showcase portion of the luncheon banquet. A profile of the group has been launched at www.genv.net/en-us/team/merrimack_biodiesel_crew.

Desiree Amadeo, a senior at Merrimack High and Biodiesel Crew member, said William McDonough's environmentally conscious book, "Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things," and the global warming documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," prompted her and some of her Advanced Placement chemistry classmates to take action.

In 2005, the group began an initiative to produce biodiesel from canola oil and vegetable oil. They eventually started asking local restaurants for their used fryer oil. Tray Sleeper, AP chemistry teacher and adviser to the Biodiesel Crew, said there have been about 20 students at Merrimack High who have assisted in putting together the biodiesel bus project, ranging from those who helped build a fuel converter to those who aided in conceptualizing the project.

Sleeper also said United Way-Youth Venture played a big part in the promotion of their project.

"Youth Venture gave us the grant that allowed us to grow and see this project through," said Sleeper. "It helped the (Biodiesel Crew) to continue."

While the Biodiesel Crew has received more than \$10,000 worth of grants – including a grant from United Way-Youth Venture and two donated buses from Laidlaw Bus Co. in St. Louis, Amadeo said its just the beginning. "We're trying to make this program as integrated with the school as we can," said Amadeo. "And get as many people involved as we can."

Becky Cyganiewicz, coordinator for North Central Massachusetts United Way-Youth Venture, said the program enables students to showcase their hard work and meet like-minded individuals.

"Giving these students the chance to connect is imperative, so that they can do something bigger for their state, country, and world," Cyganiewicz said outside the banquet hall at the Colonial Hotel during the United Way-Youth Venture celebration. Nashua High School North, Nashua High School South and Souhegan High School also had students who participated in the event.

Many of the programs focused on providing services for nonprofit organizations, promoting environmental awareness and volunteering time and assistance to those in need.