

Local Schoolchildren Ready for Earth Day

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In Toni Rockwell's third-grade class at Rideout Elementary School, excitement is building as Earth Day nears. Rockwell, with help from community members, is getting the children involved in various projects that are fun and teach about Lake Tahoe's environment. She is one of a growing number of teachers who have been implementing "place-based learning" in the school curriculum. This method supplements textbook study with experiences and projects where the kids live. By learning about the Tahoe environment, students get the sense that school is relevant to their daily lives. Furthermore, studies show that using the environment as an "integrating context" can improve student performance on the standards-based tests now administered in our schools.

With Earth Day right around the corner on April 22, Rockwell has divided her class into groups of five children to work on creative projects. Some of these involve creating public service announcements, drawing cartoons that examine best management practices (BMPs), and creating a rap song about the local issues. One group has created a puppet show with student-made puppets to represent various aspects of the Tahoe ecosystem including a fish that is pleading for clean water.

By making these projects fun, Rockwell creates enthusiasm that makes the learning more long



lasting. She also sometimes invites natural resource professionals from the community to make presentations to the class. The Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition (LTEEC), the Sierra Watershed Education Partnership (SWEP), and Adopt-A-Watershed (AAW) have trained these "community leaders in the classroom" to give presentations that will make a difference in young minds. For example, Michael Hogan, a soil scientist from Tahoma, discusses the microcommunity of life that makes our topsoil a source of diverse vegetation, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection. Telling the story of Donnie

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Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition

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Dirt and Connie Clay, Hogan gets the kids thinking about the natural cycles of growth and decay and about how we can restore such processes by making and using compost at home. To learn more about place-based learning, service learning projects, and other environmental education programs that can be introduced into our local schools, please call Jill Sarick, (775) 832-4167.

Rockwell and other teachers like her hope that families will take the opportunity to attend the Earth Day events this year, which are bigger and better than ever. LTEEC and other groups have organized the Tahoe Truckee Earth Day Festival at Northstar Village on April 19, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. This has become the region's largest family environmental event. Last year approximately 3,000 people attended the festival, which is both educational and entertaining. Local and regional bands will perform all day at this free event. Nearly all local and regional natural resource agencies and nonprofit groups will have information booths, with literature and professionals ready to answer questions and describe their efforts to protect Tahoe's fragile ecosystem.

Besides the booths and music, there will be plenty to experience at the festival, including food and drink, earth-friendly vendors, hands-on activities, arts and crafts, an interactive watershed mural, a

bounce house for the kids, solar and wind power exhibits, a super-efficient Hybrid vehicle display and a live remote on KTHX radio with CD giveaways. There will also be an Earth Day raffle featuring great prizes sponsored by local businesses, including a midweek ski pass for Northstar.

The South Shore Earth Day Festival is 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., April 26 at Lake Tahoe Community College, and it is also be free to the public. This year's event theme is "Water for Life." Natural resource agencies and nonprofits will also be providing information booths and displays for participants of all ages.