

Student Art Promotes Community Recycling

(Longview, Texas)

How do you promote recycling, sustainability and community involvement all at the same time? By having a recycling art contest that challenges elementary, jr. high and high school students in three school districts as well as private schools with the winners' art being displayed on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) refuse trucks, of course.

The "Recycling in Longview, Texas" art contest has been a very simple yet incredibly visible recycling promotion program. It all started when the Sanitation Division purchased eight brand-new fully-automated garbage trucks in the summer of 2014 to help service their 25,000 households. The City had just changed from a semi-automated collection system to a fully-automated system in order to handle the increased volume of recycling. David Simmons, City of Longview Sanitation Manager, recalls, "We were very excited to see the demand for recycling collection increase so much that we needed to revamp our entire system, allowing us to increase our recycling by 45% from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015. We were also very proud that we were able to purchase CNG vehicles to assist in



Ninth grade students at Pine Tree High School



Simmons presenting a winner

improving the region's air quality. As these trucks started rolling in we kept wondering how we could promote the fact that they were CNG. This is what started the proverbial ball (or should we say truck?) rolling. Staff put a large decal on one of the trucks that promoted the fact that it was a clean energy vehicle. According to Simmons, "We really liked how the first one turned out and were going to put it on all the trucks when we thought about how that space could be utilized to promote recycling throughout our community. As we researched this we found

where other cities had made recycling wraps or had artists design recycling decals. We really liked the idea and then the lightbulb went off; we thought how awesome would this be if we could get the schools involved in advocating recycling?" To assist in making contact with the schools, the Sanitation Division turned to their community partner Keep Longview Beautiful. KLB immediately saw the potential of the program and agreed to assist.

In the Spring of 2015 Simmons and Keep Longview Beautiful Executive Director Kim Droege met with staff from Longview Independent School District and Pine Tree Independent School District to develop the rules for an art contest with the theme "Recycling in Longview, Texas! It's FUNdamental to our environment." In December of 2015 ten campuses from all over Longview turned in their 10 best pieces

of art. The public was then invited to help judge and vote for the sixteen they wanted displayed on the trucks.

In January 2016 the art was ready to unveil. Each Thursday for eight weeks, a truck was delivered to Sign Proto have the two pieces of art (decals) installed. Then, on Friday “Reveal” day would be held at the winners’ campus’. Sanitation workers would take the truck with the new art to the school campus and cover it with a tarp. The students would then gather and Simmons would talk briefly about recycling. Great care was taken by school staff to inform the parents but make sure that the students didn’t know whose masterpiece was under the tarp.

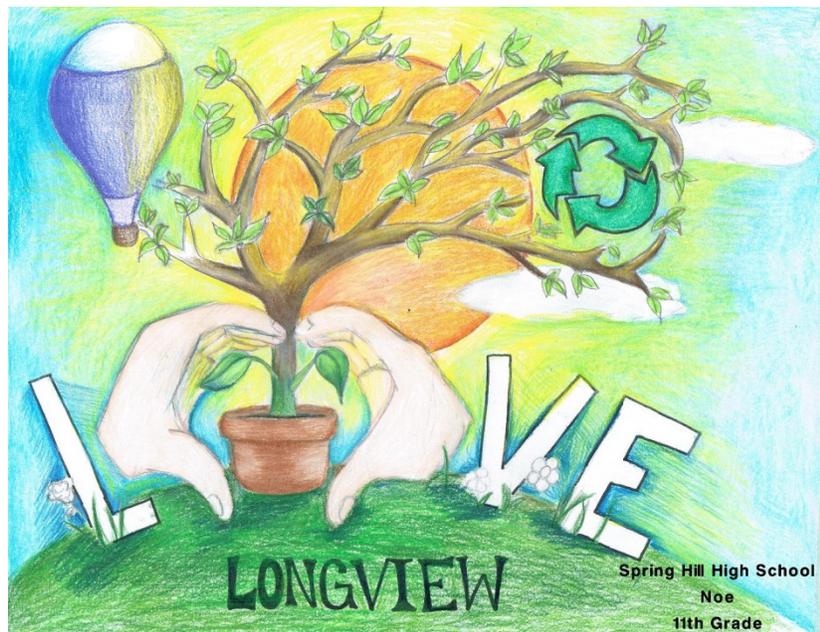
The day finally came for the first reveal. “Thank you for teaching our community how to recycle”, Simmons said to a group of about 50 second graders at Pine Tree Elementary School.

“Everywhere these trucks go they are showing your talent and reminding people to recycle” he said as he pointed to a CNG trash truck that had a 4 ft by 10 ft graphic of one student’s masterpiece hidden under a tarp. “You all are such great artists and have done a fantastic job. We are so proud of

you.” As he wrapped up his speech, Simmons asked the excited children if they want him to keep talking or pull the tarp. They unanimously cried “Pull the tarp”, and they counted down “3...2...1...pull!” The students squealed with excitement as the tarp came down and the name was called.

This scenario was repeated 15 times over the next two months. Throughout all the reveals, students were very receptive really enjoying seeing their peers’ art on the big blue trucks. The reactions they had when seeing their art on those trucks were wonderful. Some jumped for joy, other cried with their families and most just stood their eyes wide as saucers in disbelief. The best line of the reveal was when a second grade student leaned over to his speechless friend staring at a giant size art on the side of a trash truck and said “Did you draw it that big?!”

But the students weren’t the only ones who enjoyed this program. Media, School employees, City Staff and Keep Longview Beautiful Volunteers attended each event and were very impressed with how so many members of the community came together to make this program happen. “The Art on a Truck recycling contest provides our students with an opportunity to be creative and to impact our community”, said Superintendent of Pine Tree Independent School District Dr. Teresa (TJ) Farler. “Our



Sample of student's art

students and community will take great pride in seeing the efforts of the artists and a great message on the recycling trucks. Hopefully, when people see the art graphics on the trucks, it will encourage them to recycle more and to have more pride in our community.” Mrs. Droege commented on the fact that the trucks will help remind people that “recycling is the right thing to do.”

In order to help pay for the artwork the City of Longview received a grant from the local Council of Governments. The sixteen vinyl decals cost around \$5,200 with installation. As that old commercial might go “Student recycling art contest - \$5,000; seeing the reaction on a child’s face when the art is revealed on a giant garbage truck – Priceless.”

The community will benefit from these educational advertisements for years to come. Not only will these great signs last a long time, there will be a network enthusiastic to do another contest for another class of student artists.



Above left: Second grade student gets her picture with her teachers in front of her artwork. ***Above right:*** Eighth grade students at Foster Middle School watching the presentation. ***Left:*** Students at Trinity School of Texas lining up to see their school’s winner.