

Wheelabrator Technologies' Symposium for Environment and Education marks 15 years

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Wheelabrator Technologies Inc.

Media

Melissa Lohnes
(603) 929-3193
mlohnes@wm.com

SUNRISE, Fla. - May 12, 2009 - Fifteen years ago, Wheelabrator Technologies' senior management team envisioned a program that would help foster environmental and social awareness in the youth of its client communities. Today, the Wheelabrator Symposium for Environment and Education has become the centerpiece of the company's community relations program and the highlight of many students' academic years.

"I really want to help my school go green," said Courtney Diamond, an eighth-grader from Millbury, Mass., who helped bring wind-turbine technology to her school. "I enjoyed collaborating with all of my peers to accomplish our goal. We definitely put in over 100 hours of work, but it was all worth it."

The symposium, which kicked off in Concord, N.H., in 1994, is a six-month learning project in which middle-school students identify an environmental challenge in their community and develop a long-term solution. They present their findings to a panel of educators, government officials and local community volunteers at the culmination of the project each May. This year's symposium was held in Sunrise, Fla.

"Since the start, more than 1,500 seventh- and eighth-graders have had the opportunity to do something positive in their communities," said Wheelabrator Vice President of Public Affairs Frank Ferraro. "We've seen a variety of interesting projects, from radon awareness to beekeeping to graffiti removal. Their hard work is what sets them apart. They're not just good students; they're great students."

"The symposium has been able to sustain itself for so long thanks to the students, the dedicated Wheelabrator employees and, most importantly, the teachers who have invested so much extra time and effort because they care about their students and what they will do for the environment," said Linda Sapienza, Wheelabrator's director of community relations.

This year, seven teachers representing five participating schools were honored for their longevity, amounting to at least 10 years of involvement in the program. They are:

- Stephen Brown, Lisbon Central School, Lisbon, Conn.;
- John Cooley, Peekskill Middle School, Peekskill, N.Y.;
- John Hillier, Millbury Memorial Jr./Sr. High School, Millbury, Mass.;
- Kathleen Lewis Horwatt, FDR Middle School, Bristol, Penn.;
- Meredith Mueller, FDR Middle School, Bristol, Penn.;
- Stella Shelby, Westglades Middle School, Parkland, Fla.; and
- Mark Sutphen, Millbury Memorial Jr./Sr. High School, Millbury, Mass.

"For Wheelabrator to give us the resources to take on environmental programs in our community, it's so unique," said Brown, who has advised teams for 14 years. "It's life-changing for our kids."

"Kids at this age level are almost never asked to work on a project of this magnitude, putting together an elaborate PowerPoint presentation and developing an idea over the course of six months," said Sutphen, in his 12th year of participation. "They'll never forget this opportunity."

Across the board, the most significant changes to the symposium have been a result of technology enhancements. In the early years, students used VHS tapes, overhead projectors and transparencies. Today's multi-media presentations include videos, music, interactive charts and photo slideshows - brought to life by the click of a mouse.

"It was much less integrated in the beginning, but the kids still had to come up with an idea and commit to a solution," said Sutphen. "The telling of the story was just a little harder."

Another shift has been in the mounting level of students' expertise.

"The kids have always been bright, smart and so excited about their projects," said Shelby, who has been involved with the symposium since the start. "But I think today's students are more sophisticated in terms of awareness, not just at the local level, but globally. So many are already involved in green initiatives and have grown up recycling, so they already have a good base."

"This company started organizing the symposium long before green was cool, but every year the students have come forward, passionate and driven to make a difference," said Wheelabrator Vice President of Operations William Roberts. "You can't be at this event and not be impressed with the youth of America."

The multi-day event also includes an award ceremony and dinner, as well as an activities day, designed to be both educational and entertaining. Past adventures have included exploring the Everglades; touring the Miami Seaquarium, a world-class marine-life entertainment park; camping; and visiting other parks and nature sanctuaries.

This year also marks the 15th anniversary of Wheelabrator's partnership with Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn. Dr. Henry Ponder, former university president, served as a judge for the symposium in its inaugural year and was eager to set up a four-year scholarship at the university for symposium participants. Kent Wallace, director of physics laboratories at Fisk was a featured speaker at this year's event.

"It was really motivating to interact with the youth," said Wallace. "These students are the next generation of scientists and examples of those who are going above and beyond. When they get to college, they'll already be ahead of the game."

About Wheelabrator Technologies Inc.

A wholly owned subsidiary of Waste Management of Houston, Texas, Wheelabrator Technologies Inc. is a world leader in the safe and environmentally sound conversion of municipal solid waste and other renewable waste fuels into clean energy. Wheelabrator's 17 waste-to-energy facilities provide safe waste disposal for towns and cities across the U.S. Wheelabrator also operates five independent power plants designed to generate electricity using an assortment of fuels, including waste wood, tires, waste coal, and natural gas. In addition to producing electricity, some of these facilities also produce steam sold to nearby government and commercial establishments. Wheelabrator's 22 facilities have a combined electric generating capacity of 896 megawatts, enough energy to power more than 985,000 homes. To learn more, visit www.wheelabratortechologies.com.

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Waste Management, based in Houston, Texas, is the leading provider of comprehensive waste management services in North America. Through its subsidiaries, the company provides collection, transfer, recycling and resource recovery, and disposal services. It is also a leading developer, operator and owner of waste-to-energy and landfill gas-to-energy facilities in the United States. The company's customers include residential, commercial, industrial, and municipal customers throughout North America. To learn more, visit www.wm.com or www.thinkgreen.com.

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