

The Palm Beach Post

At Jupiter Farms Elementary, 'green' is way of life

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Posted: 9:16 a.m. Wednesday, April 28, 2010

Going "green" is the new catch phrase in schools, government and business, but at Jupiter Farms Elementary School, it's an established way of life.

"Green is very in vogue now, but we've been green for 18 years," said Principal Marilyn Weisgerber.

Indeed, Jupiter Farms Elementary has so many environmental programs and activities throughout the year that Weisgerber is hard-pressed to remember them all. So it was no surprise last week when the school was named one of the top three "green" schools in Palm Beach County during the second annual Green Schools Recognition luncheon.

"We're really honored," she said. "We feel this award is a nice way to conclude the year."

The other top two schools were Pine Jog Elementary School and Roosevelt Middle School, both in West Palm Beach. The top three schools were recognized for demonstrating "exceptional leadership" and serving as a model to other schools.

Pine Jog as the first-place winner, received a \$2,000 cash award, while Jupiter Farms and Roosevelt, as runners-up, each received \$1,000. The schools will use the money to continue their green programs. Pine Jog Environmental Education Center at [Florida Atlantic University](#) hosted the luncheon at the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin counties. Five other schools received smaller cash awards. Twenty-six public and private schools were recognized.

The program recognizes schools that take a "holistic and innovative approach to going green."

Environmental efforts in the Palm Beach County School District aren't limited to the schools. The district has been making efforts to conserve energy and recycle for about 20 years, said Lee Kapp, the district's utilities/energy manager.

In recent years, those efforts have increased with computerized technology helping school officials not only monitor energy and water consumption but shut down systems automatically at certain times of day to save on air conditioning, power and water use.

And, for what computers can't control, the district has an overnight conservation crew that has gone to schools to see what small things - a copier or computer monitor here and there - can be shut down for additional savings. The crew identified \$1 million in savings in the past six months alone, he said.

School clean-up crews also started using non-toxic "green" cleaning products in elementary schools two years ago. Those products should be used in all schools by the end of the school year, said Christina Crespo, the district's recycling and sustainability coordinator.

Jupiter Farms Elementary, an open campus in the woods near wetlands, has always been a "perfect fit" for being green, Weisgerber said.

The school has an environmental club, a recycling program, an annual campus clean up, regular "trash-free" family picnics, and butterfly tours led by students on nature trails around the school. Last week, the school had "Ladybug Day," which involved studying, observing and finally releasing ladybugs.

Environmental activities are done all year long and, over time, there have been more and more, she said.

"It just kept going and going," Weisgerber said.