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Contact: Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795

Lawrence Ragonese (609) 292-2994

Bob Considine (609) 984-1795

FOUR SCHOOLS IN NEW JERSEY NOMINATED FOR FEDERAL GREEN RIBBON ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS PROGRAM

(12/P36) TRENTON – In recognition of their efforts to bring sustainability to the classroom, four New Jersey schools have been selected to take part in the inaugural federal Green Ribbons Schools Program, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin has announced.

Selected schools are the Willow School in Gladstone; Midtown Community Elementary School in Neptune; Alder Avenue Middle School in Egg Harbor and Bernards High School in Bernardsville.

They were chosen in a joint selection process by the DEP, state Department of Education, and the Educational Information and Resource Center for creating energy-efficient, sustainable and healthy school environments and promoting environmental literacy of their students.

The four schools were recognized this week at the New Jersey Sustainable Schools Conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Monroe, Middlesex County.

"We congratulate these schools and their students for their innovative efforts to show how we can all work to improve our environment," said Commissioner Martin. "The steps they are taking fit right into Governor Christie's energy master plan when it comes to energy saving and efficiency, and better managing how we use energy."

Acting Education Commissioner Chris Cerf added, "We are excited to identify these schools not only for taking steps to deliver a more environmentally friendly school environment but also for providing an education around real world issues that students will face in the 21st Century."

The U.S. Department of Education, which launched the national competition to honor the highest performing green schools in the nation, will formally announce the national winners in a ceremony on April 23, 2012 in Washington, D.C. New Jersey is one of thirty-four states participating in the national Green Ribbon Schools Program.

The four schools were selected based on their infrastructure and commitment to sound environmental programs and policies.

- The Willow School, an independent K-8 school on 34 acres, scored highest of the four New Jersey schools for its 9-year status as a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) school and integration of environmental sustainability into its core curriculum. The campus' main building was made from environmentally-sensitive building products, including salvaged lumber, and utilizes an energy-efficient electrical system. The school also opened a new Health, Wellness and Nutrition

Center on campus this year that meets LEED Platinum Standards.

- The Midtown Community Elementary School, completed in 2008, became the largest public school in North America to earn Platinum LEED status in October, 2011. The building was constructed as a sustainable site uses geothermal wells, which makes heat by using the Earth's natural temperature. Ninety-percent of school space has daylight and open views, while its rooftop garden serves as a popular educational outdoor classroom. The aqueducts on the rooftop garden also capture and re-use rainwater on site.
- At Alder Avenue Middle School, students are integrated into a grassroots environmental educational program called The Catawba Project. The program puts students in charge of championing their own environmental causes and planning classroom activities involving the environment. A solar-powered system was installed at the school in 2009. Further energy efficiency is embarked upon with the Energy Education® program where staff members are required to turn off all lights, computers and power strips.
- In addition to implementing green infrastructure upgrades, including a planned installation of solar panels on the roof this summer, Bernards High School has utilized low and no-cost behavioral strategies that have resulted in a 12 percent cut in energy consumption. Students also seek opportunities to improve energy efficiency through the Schools for Energy Efficiency program, while the student Green Team organizes composting, recycling and organic garden activities and events to promote sustainability.

"The DEP is extremely proud to be playing a part in this important program," said Bob Marshall, DEP Assistant Commissioner for Sustainability and Green Energy. "All of us could learn a lesson or two from these green schools, which are paving the way for a more sustainable future by adopting a host of environmentally friendly practices. Through their commitment and innovative programs, these schools are developing tomorrow's environmental leaders today."

Participating New Jersey schools were selected and graded by a committee led by the EIRC, DEP, DOE, New Jersey School Boards Association, New Jersey Association of School Administrators, Project Learning Tree – Green Schools, New Jersey Audubon, Sustainable Jersey, United States Green Building Council – and the Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education.

"The Educational Information and Resource Center is committed to assisting schools with creating pathways to a sustainable future that result in lower operating costs and improved student achievement," said Carol James, program development coordinator at the EIRC. "The end goal is to help schools become more cost-efficient while becoming environmentally healthy places to learn, work, and play."

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