



## **Back2Tap raises awareness and funds to save the environment**

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THE CHATHAMS -- Almost 270,000 gallons of water, 8,000 gallons of oil and 44 tons of CO2 -- that's the amount of resources residents will save in one year by using their new Chatham stainless steel reusable bottles instead of disposable plastic bottles.

"This proves that a simple step can help save the environment," said Mary Lonergan, who helped to organize the Back2Tap campaign. "And it helps that the stainless steel bottles with the Chatham cougar paw are a real hit with the kids!"

More than 1,500 bottles were delivered to Chatham residents during the first week of May. Southern Boulevard School (SBS) families accounted for almost 400 of the bottles, the most sold at any of the schools. According to SBS Principal Ralph Pescapane, "Back2Tap provided our school community with a springboard to get rid of the plastic bottle syndrome and set the families on a safer and healthier road. Chatham water is great - why not take advantage of it!"

The success of the program was due to the contribution of many interested parties. Last fall, the Back2Tap committee presented the environmental benefits of using reusable bottles to the Chatham Recreation Department. The Recreation Department, concerned with the volume of waste found on the fields, then notified the coaches to encourage players to switch from disposable to reusable bottles for all sports events.

The rollout of Back2Tap continued in the schools in the winter and spring. According to Ann Worden, Environmental Committee Advisor at Lafayette Avenue School "The sale of the reusable bottles went very well. And the students were very interested in 'The Life Cycle of a Disposable Plastic Water Bottle' presentation." In other Chatham schools, posters were made and displayed to encourage the switch, and even a five foot tower was made out of 250 plastic water bottles and brought around to each school in order to expose the waste generated from one school in one day.

When the bottles arrived, many volunteers helped to organize them by classroom and to personalize each one with the recipient's name and phone number. "We knew these were more expensive than typical plastic water bottles and wanted to be sure all the bottles were personalized in case they got lost," said Lydia Chambers. "We have many people to thank for the success of this effort."

Changes in water drinking habits are now starting to show up at the schools. "The students now better understand how they can help the environment by not using plastic water bottles. This has been demonstrated during our monthly Pizza Day lunches where students willingly take tap water poured from water jugs," said Mary Quigley, the principal at Washington Avenue School. "I see the new stainless steel bottles in kids' lunchboxes - the water stays cool and refreshing for a much longer time than in plastic," said Mr. Pesapane.

Jill Gallagher, a mother of three students in the Chatham public schools, thinks the reusable bottles are great. "My kids take their bottles to school with them every day and just refill them when they are thirsty. It's so much more convenient than packing those little plastic bottles every day." Jill also noted that for the annual SBS Field Day event held last week, coordinators Ginny Icart and Amira Bixby were able to fund a water dunking machine, which the kids loved, with the money they would normally have spent on plastic water bottles for all the students. "It was such a better use of money", said Jill.

Since the Back2Tap program was set up as a fundraiser, almost \$8,000 has been raised to fund tap water dispensers that will provide cool, filtered water to students and staff in the schools. "The Back2Tap committee created an awareness of the natural resources that are used to generate plastic bottles. We are overwhelmed by the Lafayette response to this initiative. Our students are aware and changing their habits," said Principal Cheryl Caggiano. "Lafayette is working with two companies that are providing us with a fair price to provide our students and staff with a bottleless water dispenser to fill their new Back2Tap water bottles with filtered tap water."

The popularity of the program caught the eye of Chatham Township resident Craig Alperowitz. Mr. Alperowitz is the managing director at DeVries Public Relations whose client is Proctor & Gamble, the makers of PUR Water Filtration. Having just launched a national campaign featuring Cindy Crawford encouraging Americans to switch to filtered water, he was very interested in contributing to the cause and asked PUR to donate several pitchers for use throughout the schools. "I was instantly impressed with the Back2Tap initiative and admired the hard work and dedication of the group's efforts," said Mr. Alperowitz. "Working with PUR is inspirational on so many levels that when I had the chance to tie into the school system which my oldest daughter will be entering in the fall, it really hit home for me."

This success of Back2Tap has inspired the committee to roll the program out as a "green" fundraising business at other schools. Chatham PTOs and school environmental clubs are considering selling the bottles again in the fall. "It would be great to see a switch to reusable bottles across the country," said Mrs. Lonergan. For more information on Back2Tap, contact Mary Lonergan at 973-701-1814.

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