

# Students doing their bit for environment They've spread the fever at Wheeler School

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It is a most dignified setting. Before the proud, sturdy, red brick walls of the Wheeler School stands student Michael Isenberg, wearing a blue-striped yellow oxford button-down shirt that seems to highlight his red hair.

But what's this? Isenberg suddenly destroys the atmosphere. He sticks his arms into a cruddy plastic garbage bag and starts rummaging around in there for - for what?

Cans, of course.

Isenberg and his partner, Brian Franklin, both Wheeler juniors, have been bitten by the lessons of a freshman year environmental studies course and have spread the fever to their whole school.

Not only have the two managed to start a major paper and can recycling effort, but they've persuaded the editors of the school newspaper, The Spoke, to switch from glossy to recyclable paper. They've started an environmental and recycling club called Awareness In Action.

And - talk about ambitious - they've even helped the school raise money to purchase 60 acres of rainforest in Costa Rica.

These guys even read Garbage Magazine.

After emptying the garbage bag of aluminum cans, Isenberg and Franklin drag the outer garbage pail back inside, and head up the stairs. But Isenberg suddenly stops short.

"Hold up, Bri," he yells to his partner, then bends over to pick up a copy of the school newspaper lying in the hallway. Another bit of paper, saved for recycling.

These two really appreciate the environment. Iraq's dumping of oil into the Persian Gulf, harming wildlife there, has struck Isenberg hard. "I'm sensitive," he says. "I find it gruesome."

"They're funny. It's their thing at school, their niche," says Wheeler teacher Alison Becker.

"They really believe in this. It takes the place of being a basketball star - they're the recycling kings."

This environmental awareness bug that Isenberg and Franklin have caught can be traced to Wheeler's environmental science teacher, Ron Brown, who just had to make his class so darn funny and exciting that his students actually took his lessons to heart.

So inspired by the course was Isenberg that a year later he was still trying to figure out how to help the environment.

He was sitting in the school science office one day, doing some work, when he overheard Brown talking about starting a paper recycling effort. Isenberg's face lit up. Here was the opportunity he was seeking.

Franklin, meanwhile, heard about a can recycling project at Milton Academy, and thought he might try to replicate it at Wheeler.

The two obtained 85 blue recycling bins from the state, and distributed them to every classroom and office. They had an assembly, and Isenberg, the more vocal one, told his classmates what could be recycled and what couldn't. He even went into the office of Wheeler Headmaster Bill Prescott and told him what to do with his blue bin.

They worked with the school business manager, and got the school janitor staff to empty the paper bins every week.

Franklin emptied the can bins himself, and got so wrapped up in it he even brought the cans home and cleaned them in the kitchen sink. His parents weren't too hot on that idea, but they sure liked his recycling program.

These days, the two collect 600 pounds of paper each week. They hope that will reduce from six to five the number of times every two weeks the giant dumpster out back must be emptied, saving the school money.

Emptying the can bins is kind of a hassle, Franklin says. "It's so frustrating because people throw other stuff in there, like trash and food. It's marked 'Cans Only,' but some people don't care."

Still, collecting is worth it. Since the fall, they have raised \$150. That's from bringing the cans to Ann & Hope and several other stores in Massachusetts and getting the five-cent deposit for each one. Franklin brings them to the stores himself, and he'll have to go to several, since each one has a 100-can-per-person limit.

And where does the money go? Into other environmental stuff, of course.

They have already enrolled their club, Awareness In Action, in such environmental groups as Save The Bay and the Audubon Society. And they'll purchase a subscription to Garbage Magazine, an environmental publication, for the school library.

The dynamic recycling duo haven't decided for sure, but they'll probably use the money saved from reduced dumpster pick-ups to purchase recycled paper for the school photo copy machine.

The rain forest purchase developed from a discussion by Brown, the teacher, about saving the rain forest. The students raised the money through last year's sale of Ben & Jerry's Rainforest Crunch ice cream. Now there's a 60-acre swath of rainforest in Costa Rica called Wheeler Forest.

And what is Wheeler School going to do with all that land?

Nothing. That's the point.

Well, almost nothing. Next spring, Isenberg says, the school is planning a class trip there.

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