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Who ya gonna call? Light Busters!

BY KATE MCGINITY • SHEBOYGAN PRESS STAFF • SEPTEMBER 27, 2009

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Watch out, teachers: Now the Light Busters are after your garbage cans, too.

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More than 30 seventh-graders at Farnsworth Middle School signed up last week for the second year of the Light Busters club.

The Light Busters sign up for shifts throughout the school day to monitor classrooms. If a light is spotted on in an empty room, the student flips off the light and leaves a note for the offender.

Some places — like the band room, the gymnasium or administrative offices — are off limits. Most places, though, are fair game.

The seventh-graders last year issued 88 tickets around the school — and left so many for one teacher that he threw the club a pizz-a party.

That helped save the school more than \$2,000 in electricity costs over the course of one school year.

"We actually really did make a really big difference in the lighting costs," said Shae Beltran, 13, an eighth-grader who signed up last year.

It worked so well last year that the students will take it up a notch this time around and add recycling to their watchdog duties, too. They will scan garbage cans for any recyclable items, and alert teachers to any infractions.

"Light Busters is going green," teacher and club adviser Jeff Kainz proudly announced at the introductory meeting last Thursday after school.

Kainz launched the program last year as a way to remind staff and students about being "better stewards of environment."

The program helped train faculty and staff to turn off the lights, and the infractions dropped considerably as the year progressed, alumni of the program say.

And it doesn't stop there.

"We hear a lot of parents say, 'Hey, so-and-so is telling us to turn the lights off.' They're saving their own parents money on their energy bills," Kainz said.

Club members meet monthly to talk about energy use, and they compile data to track changes in light patterns.

Early this year, the club also toured Orion Energy Systems' Manitowoc manufacturing facility to learn about efficiency and how they can help improve the environment through decreased energy consumption.

The Light Busters may not be paying their own electricity bills, but they're thinking big picture about the changes they're making.

"Everything you hear about it, it's scary when you read what can happen (to the environment)," said Sara Becker, 13, an eighth-grader who participated last year.

McKenzie Nolther, 13, also an eighth-grade alum, concurred: "You're proud of yourself for taking five minutes out of your day to help save \$5, (and) it's just caring for Mother Nature, because you only have one."



Farnsworth Middle School eighth-grader McKenzie Nolther, 13, trains seventh-grade students Gabby Eissner, 12, and Marcus Davis, 13, how to participate in the Light Busters program at the school. The program has saved the school district thousands of dollars by helping the students become aware of how to conserve energy. Photos by Gary C. Klein/The Sheboygan Press

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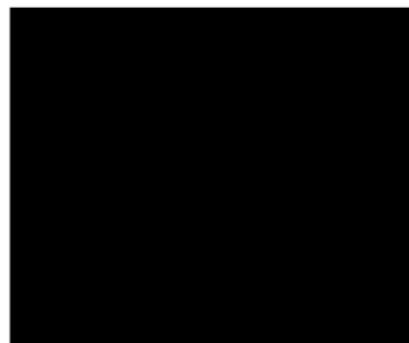
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