

Young Eco Warriors Spread Green Messages

BY DAVE GIL DE RUBIO

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With Earth Day celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, PSEG Long Island created the “I Am EM-Powered! Public Service Announcement (PSA) Student Contest” and invited third through sixth graders to participate through their schools.

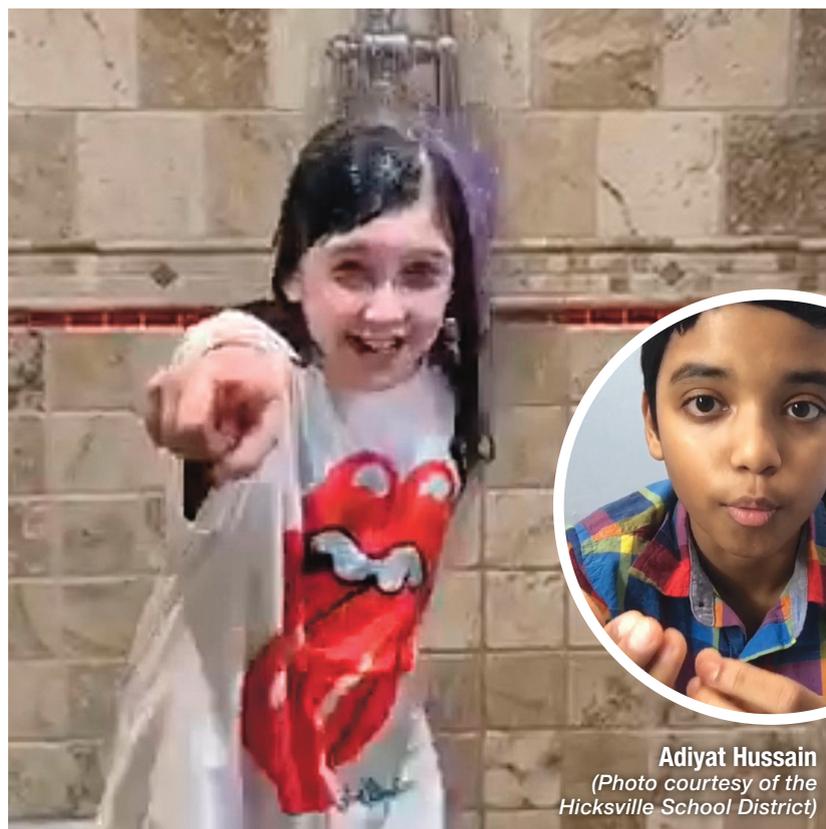
The contest was set to open in early March and end in early April, with winners announced around Earth Day on April 22. The end result was that 142 PSAs were submitted by eight teachers from 35 classrooms in five districts on Long Island and in the Rockaways. Then the coronavirus hit—schools physically closed and teaching went viral. And while a number of school districts pulled out of the program, Hicksville and Oyster Bay-East Norwich teachers, who had submitted upwards of 100 entries between them, chose to go forward.

It was a crucial enough directive that PSEG pivoted and changed the project from a contest to an activity that had more of a learning component to it.

“The topics of conserving natural resources, reducing dependency on fossil fuels and seeking renewable energy sources are paramount, especially to this generation,” PSEG Long Island Director of Customer Experience and Utility Marketing Suzanne Brienza said. “We are so pleased that despite the unusual circumstances the coronavirus pandemic created for educators, many still were able to apply the lessons of our Earth Day Public Service Announcement video contest to engage students in being advocates for protecting and saving the earth.”

A distance learning guide was quickly created to help teachers modify their lessons for this assignment to accommodate this project. The utility hired D. Barrett Associates, known for its creative, quality-driven, efficient programs and resources for educators, to develop the PSA activity entitled “I Am EM-powered—A Celebration of Earth Month Program.” Students were able to create videos in a science of social studies setting with classmates or as individuals, enlisting family members if they wanted. And rather than asking teachers to choose only their top videos to submit as winners, all submissions were welcomed.

The program included two lessons and a process on how to create a



Madeleine Ruiz (Photo courtesy of the Oyster Bay-East Norwich School District)

PSA. Lessons aligned to Science and Engineering Practices from the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the 10 Themes of Social Studies from the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) and the Core SEL Competencies from the Collaborative for Social, Academic and Social Learning (CASEL). These lessons aligned to standards that taught participants about energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. Requirements for the project included compiling research-based facts about the topics and a call to action to protect the environment and promote energy efficiency in recognition of Earth Day.

In the Oyster Bay-East Norwich School District, several of the students enlisted siblings and parents to participate in the assignment. One of the pupils was 11-year-old Madeleine Ruiz, a rising sixth grader at Oyster Bay's James H. Vernon School, who recruited her folks to help with the heavy lifting. With the theme revolving around conserving electricity and water, storyboards were created, the video was shot on an iPhone, mom played a cameo sleeping on the couch and the younger Ruiz wound up

editing the video on iMovie. It proved to a great bonding experience for the aspiring filmmaker and her parents.

“I thought the idea of making a video PSA was cool because recording a video, editing it and also telling other people how to save the earth sounded fun and I wanted to do it,” Madeleine said. “We started talking about shutting off lights and the TV, switching to LED bulbs, taking shorter showers and not wasting water in class, but these were all things I was being told to do at home. Having my parents help me shoot and act in the video with me was really fun. I am happy we could do it together as a family.”

Frank Somma, a Vernon School fifth-grade teacher, marveled at how the students were able to adapt to remotely working on this project versus being able to do it on site with their instructors and classmates.

“We began the projects right before schools closed,” Somma recalled. “The students were very upset, but became very excited once I told them we were still going to complete them. I gave them the option of working alone with family or contacting their group members to collaborate together. They all took amazing initiative and used

their expertise with technology to their advantage. I am so pleased with the final pieces of work they handed in. We really look forward to participating again next year.”

Over in Hicksville, students and staff were equally entranced by the I Am EM-Powered project. One of the participants was Adiyat Hussain, a rising sixth-grader at Hicksville Middle School interested in science and engineering.

While Hussain had no experience with video and editing prior to doing this assignment, he was helped with it by technology teacher Nicholas Naccarrato.

The 11-year-old shot it on his iPhone, edited on iMovie and enjoyed the whole process.

“My teacher said we’re likely going to run out of fossil fuels in our lifetime,” Hussain said. “It’s strange to think that something I rely on so much will one day disappear. To pass the time, I started thinking a lot about how we can reduce fossil fuel consumption. When I got this assignment, I was excited about making the video and being able to tell people about renewable energy sources like solar, wind and geothermal. I think it is nice that people want to protect and save the earth, and to make sure we don’t run out of things we really depend on.”

Naccarrato was equally pleased by the experience.

“I can’t begin to tell you how much I enjoyed this program,” Naccarrato said. “This program will now be part of my future curriculum. Understanding energy conservation and protecting our environment is a large part of these students’ futures. For students to become aware of renewable energy options, the depletion of fossil fuels and the importance of preserving our natural resources at this age, and then being encouraged to create educational Earth Day PSA videos on these topics is outstanding. We appreciate the opportunity to work with PSEG Long Island to help spread these invaluable messages.”

Do you have a story you want to tell? Share it with me at dgilderubio@antonnews.com

