

## St. Augustine students present hydroponic system during Catholic Schools Week

SOUTH BRUNSWICK - Religious Teacher Filippini Sister Mary Louise Shulas, principal of St. Augustine of Canterbury School in the Kendall Park section of South Brunswick, beamed with pride as four of her students presented their recycled hydroponic system to a standing-room only crowd at the State House in Trenton on Jan. 27, the second day of nationally-recognized Catholic Schools Week.

The students of St. Augustine of Canterbury School, one of the 23 Catholic elementary schools in the four-county Diocese of Metuchen, which encompasses Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren, were selected as winners of a poster and video contest, sponsored by the New Jersey Network of Catholic School Families.

The contest challenged Catholic school students from around the state to create a STEM-based (science, technology, engineering, math) project centered on the theme, "Our Catholic Schools use STEM to solve a school, local community or global problem."

"I'm so proud of all the Catholic schools that represented the values of Catholic education while organically integrating those values into STEM innovations," Shulas said in a statement provided by the Diocese

of Metuchen.

Speaking to their peers and school officials from the five Roman Catholic dioceses in the state, as well as interested parties and legislators, the students presented their recycled hydroponic system, which has already yielded a tomato. In addition to Shulas and several other school representatives, the students were joined at the State House by their science and social studies teacher, William Tackett, who oversaw the project.

According to Shulas, the ultimate goal of the project is to create a hydroponic vegetable garden to benefit the St. Augustine's Food Pantry and the greater community.

"Our students today are creating a better future for the greater community, while following the example of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ," she said in the statement.

The Jan. 27 presentation at the State House was held during the 46th annual Catholic Schools Week, a national celebration of Catholic school education.

"The benefit of a Catholic school education is that the message is for all of us - parents, teachers, as well as students, and so we celebrate it together," the Most Rev. James F. Checchio, Bishop of Metuchen, said in the statement. "When a student is



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**St. Augustine of Canterbury School, Kendall Park, students are recognized at the State House on Jan. 27 for their recycled hydroponic system STEM project.**

enrolled in a Catholic school, the entire family becomes a part of that school community."

As the shepherd of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Metuchen, Checchio regularly visits the Catholic schools in the Diocese.

"One of my great joys as the Bishop of the Diocese of Metuchen is to be able to spend time with our students, as I have this past week," Checchio said in the statement. "I am continually impressed by our students. Their enthusiasm is contagious and so, they always raise my spirits and remind me of what is important in our diocese and in our lives."

The bishop made several visits to schools in the Diocese of Metuchen during Catholic Schools Week, including St. James School, Basking Ridge; St. Matthew School, Edison; and he celebrated Mass at The School of St. Elizabeth at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Bernardsville.

"Our Catholic schools exist, primarily, to teach the Gospel message and enliven our students to have a personal relationship with Jesus, who is their hope and companion for life," Checchio said in the statement. "These schools are intended to be places where the everyday lessons of academic life are taught within the context of the message of God's love for us and our expression of that love by our actions in the world."

According to Dr. Robert Lockwood, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Metuchen, Catholic school students make God's love known to others and positively impact society daily through their service to the community.

"Last year our students collectively provided more than 60,000 community service hours," he said in the statement.

Students of St. Matthew School, Edison, for example, created toiletry bags for men in the local homeless shelter, and stu-

dents of St. Ambrose School, Old Bridge, held a collection for baby wipes to assist mothers and infants in need.

While Catholic Schools Week certainly provides additional opportunities for service, Catholic schools in the Diocese have a positive impact on their communities year-round, Lockwood said in the statement.

Students of Immaculata High School, which is located in Somerville and one of the four Catholic high schools in the diocese, were also recognized at the State House. For the past five years, students at the school have built and provided portable suitcase-sized solar generators to non-electrified or electricity deficient areas around the globe. The solar suitcases have been distributed to schools in the Philippines and Tanzania, a seminary in Liberia, and in Puerto Rico, following one of the recent hurricanes there.

"When the students learned that one of the suitcases would be sent to a seminary, they expressed awe that because of reliable electricity, young men were going to be ordained sooner into the priesthood and so would be able to spread the Word of God to more people, more quickly," Maureen Cote, campus ministry director, who helped guide the students alongside engineering teacher, Al Kedersha, said in the statement.

"The ripple effect of the gift of electricity to those who previously had none, will probably never be fully known, but what our students do know is that they have served the least of their brothers through the use of technology in a far-reaching, remarkable manner," Cote said in the statement.

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