

Keep me composted

By KAYLA BREEN Press-Republican
Aug 24, 2019



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WILD CENTER The food waste compost unit is installed in the shipping container at The Wild Center.

Rick Godin



SARANAC LAKE—Food waste can now be turned into rich organic material thanks to new composting systems located at three North Country locations.

Lake Placid Central School, The Wild Center and Hermon Dekalb Central School now join the North Country School Camp Treetops in their sustainability quest with locally designed and manufactured composting systems.

CLEANER GREENER COMMUNITIES

The new systems, which were installed recently, allows the schools and their local communities to process about 200 pounds of organic matter each day. In a month's time the organic matter waste is turned into nutrient-rich compost.

The composting machine, which systems are housed in retrofitted 40-foot shipping containers, were purchased in part with funds from the New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse & Recycling Green Schools Grant Program.

The estimated cost of one composting machine is around \$30,000, plus \$10,000 for the shipping container, according to a press release.

The composters are estimated to offset close to nine metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually — the equivalent of removing two vehicles from the road.

It all started with North Country School Camp Treetops' model composter, built in 2017. The initiative was part of a pilot project funded through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's Cleaner Greener Communities program.

The NYSERDA Cleaner Greener Communities program is a four-year \$100 million initiative aimed at moving communities in New York state toward a more environmentally sustainable future.

The program encourages New York State communities to develop regional sustainable growth strategies in fields like energy efficiency, emission control, low-carbon transportation, renewable energy and other carbon reductions.

North Country School Camp Treetops' composter has become a shining example of large-scale sustainability within the community.

“Composting with this in-vessel system allows organizations, municipalities or businesses to save money by reducing landfill costs, reducing methane emissions, creating a valuable soil amendment and reducing water pollution that can occur with open-air composting piles,” John Culpepper, NCS/CTT Director of Facilities and Sustainability, said in a press release.

“The shortened retention time and mechanized rotation make large-scale composting much more streamlined.”

According to the press release, North Country School Camp Treetops has processed more than 116,000 pounds of organic material, mostly food scraps. The compost is then used in the school's vegetable gardens.

The Adirondack North Country Association secured the NYSEDA funding for the North Country School Camp Treetops composter and worked closely with the school to make sure the project met its requirements and goals.

'IDEAL RECIPIENTS'

ANCA was also responsible in securing the additional funding needed for the three new composters in Adirondack Park communities, something ANCA was elated about given the chosen recipients ambition to sustainability initiatives.

"Lake Placid, Hermon DeKalb and The Wild Center stood out immediately as ideal recipients for the systems," ANCA Sustainability Project Coordinator Jennifer Perry said in a press release.

"We're excited to have these partners on board, demonstrating how the composters work and how they can benefit communities across the North Country."

The Wild Center, one of the chosen recipients, will be partnering with the Tupper Lake School District to educate students and locals about the environmental benefits of composting and the process.

The Wild Center and Tupper Lake School together will provide food scraps and integrate the composter into its "New Path Tour," which highlights the Center's sustainability initiatives.

"We are so excited about the opportunity to share this food waste reduction and education project with the thousands of visitors who come to the Wild Center every year," Director of Climate Initiatives Jen Kretser said.

"In addition to our Youth Climate Program, solar panels, living roof and LEED silver certified building, this project reinforces our mission of co-existing with nature through a commitment to a sustainable, solutions-focused future."

Village of Tupper Lake Mayor Paul Maroun also shared excitement for the composter and the education and benefits it brings to the community.

"I think this puts this on the cutting edge of composting," Maroun said.

“It's going to help the village keep our county landfill viable for more years and it's going to help the environment.”

“I think it's a great thing that everyone should be buying into,” he said.

Students from the Lake Placid High School Environmental Club first learned about North Country's drum composter while attending the Wild Center's Adirondack Youth Climate Summit.

Since attending, the students have been processing school food waste at North Country's facility for two years while learning about sustainability and environmental science.

Complete with their own composter, students are now working to create their own business model for collecting organic material from community members, operating their composter and distributing the end product while developing valuable business skills.

Hermon DeKalb Central School will include their new composter in their local food program.

Perry said the school's composting system will be supported by several committed community members including an Amish farm, a local restaurant and the State University of New York (SUNY) in Canton.

GROWING INTEREST

Locals have taken note of the growing interest for compost machines among institutions around the North Country.

Greg LeClair, who partnered with Culpepper on the original compost design at North County School, started his own small business in Upper Jay that manufactures the machines.

“Working with North Country School has been a fantastic experience. John told me what they needed the machine to do, and my team and I designed a system to meet those needs,” LeClair said.

“I love this project. If I could build these full time, I would.”

Culpepper estimates the system pays for itself in five to eight years, due to cost savings from tipping fees and the value of finished compost.

Culpepper said he receives requests for information on the composter on a daily basis.

“We envision spreading this technology around the world,” Culpepper said.

“One composer at a time.”

Email Kayla Breen:

kbreen@pressrepublican.com