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# Bourne PTA Gets SMART

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## Bourne PTA Gets SMART

Bourne Middle School learning coach and PTA member Ann-Marie Strode and school assistant principal David Lundell stand next to their new textiles recycling drop box in the school parking lot.

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PATRICIA PEAL | 0 comments

The Bourne PTA has begun collecting unwanted clothing, shoes and linens to sell to the secondary materials and recycled textiles industry (SMART).

By collecting and recycling these materials—including stuffed animals, bed, bath and kitchen linens, shoes and boots, accessories such as purses, totes, and belts, and any clothing in any condition—the PTA will keep them from ending up in the town landfill. The effort will also generate cash for the district, helping to reduce the amount of PTA fundraisers needed to raise money for programs and field trips.

“If we can earn revenue by providing a service to the town and the environment, then that’s the kind of fundraising we want to do,” said Lawrence E. Palmer, president of the Bourne PTA.

Specialized bins courtesy of Bay State Textiles of Pembroke have been placed at all four schools in town.

As a partner with the Bourne schools in this effort, Bay State Textiles will pay the PTA \$100 for every ton of fabric and textiles collected. That works out to 5 cents a pound.

The textiles company estimates that every Bourne student will generate at least 10 pounds of material waste a year, adding up to at least 21 tons.

The school bins will be weighed and emptied by Bay State Textiles once a week with a monthly check sent to the PTA. The bins hold approximately 350 to 500 pounds.

The idea was brought to the PTA last spring by Heather A.M. DiPaola. Ms. DiPaola is a member of the school committee and the Bourne Recycling Committee.

She had attended the MASS Recycles Conference in March, where she and fellow recycling

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Spotlight

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committee member Bettie Steudel learned about this joint school recycling effort underway in other cities and towns.

"I met with the Bourne PTA to pitch the idea in May and got their approval by the end of the meeting. They were thrilled with the idea of such an easy fundraiser," Ms. DiPaola said. "Together we got the support of the superintendent, business manager, and all four principals in the beginning of the summer. The PTA happily sent along their logo to be used for our bins and we were able to have the units in place for the start of school this year."

"It is a triple winner," said Kathryn Larsen, coordinator of school programs for Bay State Textiles. "The schools generate needed revenue. The town saves by keeping materials out of the landfills. It is helping the environment, and educating the students about recycling."

"This is not just a school drop box, but it is hoped that the community will donate their clothes, shoes, belts, etc., that are not able to be used any longer. The goods will get a second chance at life and also give the Bourne schoolchildren some wonderful PTA programming," Ms. DiPaola said.

Some of the clothing will indeed get a second chance at life. Every stitch of material or fabric collected is sorted by hand. Anything deemed in good condition will go to local thrift shops. Anything rejected from the good category gets sorted again, into three distinct categories: export, absorbent rags and fiber.

The export category sends not-so-perfect items overseas to developing countries for sale to the the reclaimed clothing industry. Materials, buttons and zippers are reused to make new items.

Items in the absorbent rags category are sold to commercial businesses, which use the material to make wiper cloths and cleanup rags.

The fiber category shreds or re-processes the materials into fiber for furniture stuffing or to make new materials. Shredded polyester can be granulated, then spun to make new fabric.

Very little of the collected material becomes waste because it all has some value to somebody.

The project even has value to teachers and students. Math and writing lessons have been developed using the textiles recycling concept. Some high school clubs, including the entrepreneurial and environmental clubs, are sharing the project concepts and ideas with the lower grades to help younger students understand goods and services while helping the environment by not producing waste.

"More than 520 million pounds of textiles were sent to landfills and incinerators in Massachusetts in the last year, of which 95 percent can be reused or recycled. Working with schools offers a solution to the problem of textile waste. We want to change people's mindset and make this as easy as bottle or paper recycling," Ms. Larsen said.

Other school systems working with Bay State Textiles are in the towns of Abington, Avon, Barnstable, Beverly, Burlington, Dover-Sherborn, East Bridgewater, Halifax, Hanover, Hopkinton, Hull, Kingston, Lexington, Marshfield, Medfield, Melrose, Middleboro, Milton, Natick, Peabody, Pembroke, Plainville, Plymouth, Plympton, Quincy, Reading, Swansea, Wakefield, Walpole, West Bridgewater, Wrentham and Weymouth.

The company is also talking with the Sandwich schools about a possible partnership.

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|----------------|----|----|--------|----|----|----|
| Su             | Mo | Tu | We     | Th | Fr | Sa |
|                |    |    | 1      | 2  | 3  | 4  |
| 5              | 6  | 7  | 8      | 9  | 10 | 11 |
| 12             | 13 | 14 | 15     | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 19             | 20 | 21 | 22     | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 26             | 27 | 28 | 29     | 30 | 31 |    |
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