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Pine Hills goes green

From bird feeders and binoculars to recycling and rain barrels, Pine Hills Elementary School's new "Green Team" had a busy spring.

The first initiative of the team, which includes a parent, an administrator, teachers and six students from the fourth and fifth grades, was to apply for certification in the Audubon Society School Sanctuary Program for the Environment.

In June, Audubon International designated Pine Hills Elementary as a "Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary," just the 11th school in the nation and the second in New York state to receive this high honor.



Superintendent Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D., celebrated Earth Day with students at Pine Hills Elementary School.

This is a particularly important honor for the Albany school district because Pine Hills Elementary is an urban school and may serve as an inspiration to other schools in the area, said Principal Vibetta Sanders.

"Just because we're an urban school should not prevent us from doing what we can for the environment and to educate our kids about eco-awareness," said Ms. Sanders, who helped South Colonie's Veeder Elementary School become the state's first school to earn this designation in 2004. "The sky is the limit for us as far as continuing our 'Green Team' and school-wide efforts to protect and preserve our environment."

The school's PTA provided entry fees for the certification process. The checklist had requirements in the five tracks of the program: wildlife, water, education, resource management and community awareness.

Activities included shrub plantings, a poster contest on water conservation, bird sculptures and a wildlife mural, a community clean-up day, recycling efforts and an Earth Day celebration.

Pine Hills Elementary was able to complete its certification process in a single school year, an unprecedented accomplishment, Audubon International noted.

“One thing just led to another,” said school librarian Donna Gwin, who has been working with students and faculty on the certification. “From recycling and saving energy, to beautifying the school grounds, students and teachers alike have really embraced the idea.”