
YMHS promoting sustainable education

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colorado – Yampah Mountain High School teacher and advisor Susy Ellison is excited to teach students about food.

“Our ideology is about relevance and personal responsibility and so there is nothing, in my opinion, more relevant than being part of your environment and being responsible for it,” Ellison said.

Ellison and YMHS recently received a \$10,000 grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) to participate in the Classroom Earth High School Challenge Course. The course integrates all the subjects like math, science, language arts, etc., while focusing on one subject, which in this case will be to integrate environmental education by examining the origins of agriculture and its evolution.

“We are not trying to produce food for the valley,” she said. “We’re just trying to show kids the potential for growing food and what it takes to grow food on their own.”

The grant will pay for teacher training and materials needed in construction of an actual greenhouse for the school. Architect Michael Thompson has already offered to help out with design of the structure and Jerome Ossendowski of the Culture Institute in Basalt is the lead partner for the program, according to Ellison.

“I had no idea how to build a greenhouse, but now I do,” Ellison said. “The possibilities are pretty amazing, what you can do on a low budget.”

Ellison estimated that she would have to seek other local grants for the program, as well. However, the program will not only teach students about the history of agriculture and its evolution, but will also take a look at the globalization of world food markets and the effects on local economies. The greenhouse will provide a hands on experience and provide the students with a way to quantify what they’ve learned through the program.

It’s an important and revolutionary way of instruction.

“They are the change agents,” Ellison said. “It’s sort of, the more local you can be, the less you tie in these big systems that are all around us.”

YMHS will implement the environmental education program in their studies starting in the spring of 2009, for the fourth quarter of the school year, and they will also have a complete day dedicated to food. However, the greenhouse and the program will be a sustainable education model for years to come.

“Food is catchy now, everyone is into it,” Ellison said. “And we will have the greenhouse that will provide future educational opportunities for the students.”

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