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New Fairfield students pedal to greenness

Eileen FitzGerald, Staff Writer
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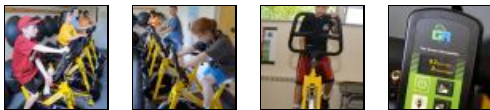
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Meeting House Hill School in New Fairfield has installed 13 Cardio Kids exercise bikes that have an electricity generator made by The Green Revolution attached. While the students exercise they help generate electricity for the school. Left to Right, Michael Ruffino, 10, Rachael Albertson, 9, Erin Monaghan, 10, Collen Alison, 8, and Joshua Robidas, 10, all enjoy the workout while generating electricity on Tuesday June 8, 2010. Photo: Lisa Weir / The News-Times Freelance



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NEW FAIRFIELD -- Nine-year-old Michael Remley pedaled as quickly as he could on a spinning bicycle beside 12 classmates who were also working just as hard in a room at Meeting House Hill School. But this wasn't a race.

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to convert student energy on fitness machines into electricity the school can use.

"I like getting in there and spinning. I like challenging myself to get to a certain number of watts," said Michael, a fourth-grader. "I think it's really going to be good for the school and good for the environment. If we don't pollute the air, there won't be too much sunlight on our planet."

Meeting House Hill physical education teachers [Casey Pilkington](#) and [Joe Fredlund](#) read a story about an area gym generating energy from exercise machines using equipment from the Ridgefield-based firm, The Green Revolution.

The school district used money from its three-year \$1 million Carol M. White federal grant to buy the equipment. The child-size spinning bikes cost about \$1,100 each, and the generators needed to convert the power are about \$500 each. The district purchased 13 bikes and generators.

"It's really an important issue in today's society -- clean energy," said [William Nemeč](#), coordinator of health and physical education for the district, especially with the ongoing oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. "It's showing the kids that they are making a difference in their carbon footprint."

Not only can the students convert their energy into electricity, Nemeč said, but this effort also reinforces first lady [Michelle Obama's](#) Let's Move campaign to combat obesity.

The students have been using the system for about five weeks. Students in the before-school program use the equipment first, and the physical education classes rotate onto them during the school day.

"It's important," 8-year-old third-grader [Colleen Allison](#) said. "You get to exercise and you get electricity."

The school will undergo a renovation after school lets out this month, and the spinning bikes will be moved into a larger exercise room.

Teacher [Susan Schenck](#) and Pilkington have written curriculum around the bikes.

"We're trying to combine exercise with science, math and health lessons," she said.

The students study energy sources, like wind power and clean versus dirty power, and the muscles used to exercise. They use math to graph their miles and the watts they're generating.

"There is huge motivation when they are on the bike," Pilkington said. "They're trying to keep going. They say, 'I'm lighting the light.' They need the visual to see that they are making a difference.

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"They're smiling the whole time. They're so interested in providing wattage that they don't realize how hard they are working."

The Green Revolution officials said the company's mission is to involve people in creating clean and renewable energy from everyday human activity that will result in sustainable behavior change, reduce carbon emissions and a healthier environment and lifestyle.

James Whelan, chief executive officer of The Green Revolution, said his company must monitor the children's spinning to learn how much energy they'll generate over time.

A typical adult group cycling class with about 20 bikes has the potential to produce up to 3.6 megawatts -- 3.6 million watts -- of renewable energy a year. That's equivalent to the power needed to light 72 homes for a month, while reducing carbon emissions by more than 5,000 pounds, according to the company.

"We're learning a lot from New Fairfield about the lessons they are using with math and the watts and science and electricity," Whelan said. "It's all new to us."

Contact Eileen FitzGerald

at eileenf@newstimes.com

or at 203-731-3333.

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This is great, but wouldn't it have been better if they learned how to build energy-creating bikes on their own? It can be done, people do it all the time. It would have made a great science project, and the school system could have saved a LOT of money. Let's see if other schools do it the right way instead of taking the quick/easy/lazy route. Great idea as a whole though, just needs some tweaking.
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