



OIS is Going Green

By Andrea A. Firth

Once each week, Kristen Nielson, a seventh grade English and History teacher at Orinda Intermediate School, has lunch with a group of students who are known as the Green Team. Nielson, a self-professed environmentalist and “greenie” for many years, coordinates a group of OIS students who are interested to improve the school’s environmental profile and to educate staff and students about the process along the way.

The idea for establishing student and faculty Green Teams and promoting green initiatives at OIS started a few months ago with a core group of committed teachers supported by Principal Michael Randall. Math teacher Laura Bramble took on the task of identifying how to improve the environmental practices on campus. Science teacher Sue Boudreau is exploring ways to incorporate environmental issues into the curriculum, and Nielson heads up staff and student activities related to OIS’ environmental efforts.

“Most of our kids think that recycling is the solution to the Earth’s problems,” notes Nielson. She is quick to point out that the three R’s to saving the environment—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle—are listed in priority order. “They don’t realize that there is so much more that we can be doing,” explains Nielson.

As a starting point for the green program at OIS, the group



(L to R) OIS students Meghan Marks, Kelly Martin, and Wendy Woodin at work on reusable utensil holders Photo Kristen Nielson

will be participating in Waste Action Month. “We are getting involved in a program where the garbage on campus will be surveyed for a month,” states Nielson. This program will provide the school with data on what is being discarded and what percentage of the trash is actually recyclable versus refuse. “The plan is then for the kids to communicate this information back to the student body,” adds Nielson.

One of the changes the student group is evaluating to help reduce the school’s consumption and waste production is a switch from using plastic cutlery at lunch to using a biodegradable brand. “I ac-

tually have some students that now bring their own utensils to use at lunch and this behavior is then modeled to others,” states Nielson.

In addition, the students on the Green Team also provide a “green message” or environmental tip through the morning school video announcements and the school’s electronic newsletter each week. “When we meet, I ask them to look at how they can change their own behaviors.” explains Nielson. “Then we brainstorm about how we can bring change here at school.”

OIS’ Community Service Program has jumped on the green wagon as well. Through the Save

the Bay Program, each month a group of Orinda middle-schoolers heads out early on Saturday morning ready to dig, plant, and weed to help to protect and restore area wetlands. “We have tried to provide the students with more regular opportunities for community service with an environmental focus,” explains Kathy Jones, the parent coordinator of the Others First Community Service Program at OIS. In addition the students provide regular volunteer support at the Wagner Ranch Nature Area, and twice a year they help out at the cleanup days sponsored by the Friends of Orinda Creeks.