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Derry students receive national award by EPA

By Julie Huss

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DERRY — Three students from Derry were among a select few in the nation recognized yesterday in Washington, D.C. by EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson at the 2008 President's Environmental Youth Awards.

The local students were selected for the award thanks to their work developing "Green Your Lives," a student-led initiative at Gilbert H. Hood Middle School in Derry. The program educates students and the school community about "going green" and putting their knowledge into action.

The students, Dylan Mahalingam, Nisha Naik and Hillary Hughes, decided to start the project with the goal of promoting greener lifestyle choices in their community, helping people to also reduce energy costs and carbon emissions.

"The president joins me in honoring these students for leading the way towards a brighter future for their communities and our planet," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "In each of these amazing projects we see our country's future for clean energy, preservation, healthy communities and a well-protected planet."

The work kicked off within the school, focusing on energy conservation, waste reduction and recycling. It then expanded to include a community outreach program - "Give and Go" - in nearby Bedford, where they educated more students and community members on easy ways to incorporate environmental awareness into their lives. Their outreach included an informational website, public service announcements, educational posters and videos for several schools across the state and country, and even building a model solar car and experimenting on creating a hydro prototype.

Winners for the Presidential Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA) were selected from among applicants to EPA's 10 regional offices. Regional EPA panels judged the projects on environmental need, accomplishments of goals, long-term environmental benefits and positive impact on local communities. The panels also consider project design, coordination, implementation, innovation and soundness of approach. PEYA has been presented annually since 1971 to honor students in kindergarten through 12th grade who design and implement innovative environmental projects.