

Park Rapids Century Middle Schools

The Minnesota Power-sponsored Learn & Earn energy conservation education program about compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs is drawing more customers into Park Ace Hardware, says store manager Brad Dahn. Why?

“We do lighting demonstrations comparing energy usage of a regular incandescent light bulb with a CFL,” Dahn said. “We hook them up to a meter. And that little meter sold us more light bulbs than you can ever imagine.”

Through the Learn & Earn program Dahn and his staff at the Ace Hardware store in Park Rapids teamed up with co-sponsors MP, Todd Wadena Electric Cooperative, Utke Hardware, Coborn’s Grocery Store, L&M Fleet Supply and Park Rapids Century Middle School students to promote the economic and environmental benefits of energy-efficient CFLs. The program includes a special sale on qualified CFLs at participating retailer locations.

Promotional articles and ads were placed in local media and rebate coupons were distributed within the community by the 7th and 8th grade students. Coupons were also available through participating retailers.

With coaching from their science teacher, Nate Larrison, the students participated in hands-on experiments using watt meters to measure the energy performance of various lighting products. They also conducted research and developed strategies to share their new-found energy knowledge with fellow students, family members and the community.

MP Regional Account Manager Mary Bindewald and Tim Pavek of Todd Wadena Electric Cooperative recently presented students with the hard-earned fruits of their labor: a check for \$2,500 to benefit the school’s science activities and charitable environmental causes. This Learn & Earn event resulted in the sale of 5,506 energy-efficient lighting products purchased at participating retailer locations. The sale will also result in saving enough energy to power 32 homes for a year, saving 399 tons of carbon (equivalent to taking 80 cars off the road for a year) and annual energy savings of \$25,000.



From left: Park Rapids students Jack Schmigdahl and Dillion Preston, MP Regional Account Manager Mary Bindewald, Tim Pavek of Todd Wadena Electric Cooperative, science teacher Nate Larrison, student Jeff Johnson, Dean of Students Jeff Johnson and student Eva Hoefker. Students received a check and certificate of appreciation for their Learn & Earn success.

“This project was designed for students to do something to help the environment, and more specifically, energy conservation through the use and promotion of CFL light bulbs,” said school science teacher Nate Larrison. “It was very successful because the students did their part to help save the environment and we also raised money for our school.”

“Learn & Earn gives us a chance to educate the public on CFL bulbs,” said Dahn. “If our customers are interested in CFLs, chances are they’ll be interested in other energy-efficient products, too. And it’s kind of fun with our customers. At first, they didn’t even know what CFL stands for. Now, we have a lot of light displays and they can see with their own eyes how good the quality of the light is. Seeing is believing—that’s what we say at our store.”

Dahn said his employees have been creative in setting up displays of energy-efficient lighting. “Our employees get in on it, too,” he said. “They set up mini-Christmas trees for the holiday season. On one they put just one string of the regular, old-fashioned Christmas bulbs. On the other tree, they decorated with three strings of the efficient LED holiday lights. That demonstration meter just spun and spun on the one string of old-fashioned bulbs—but it barely spun at all for the LEDs. Customers said they just wouldn’t have believed the difference if they hadn’t seen it with their own eyes”.

Dahn and his staff have also noted that people are becoming more educated about CFLs—and more willing to pay the higher purchase price for energy-efficient lights, because they know they’re going to get a payback in money saved and in increased efficiency.

“The kids are coming into the store with their parents,” Dahn said, “and adults are coming in, too. They say, ‘My kids told me I’d better come in here and buy these new CFL bulbs.’ The students did a great job in promoting Learn & Earn.”
