

Basalt reaps the rewards after winning plastic bag challenge

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BASALT - One good environmental deed in Basalt led to another on Wednesday.

The town won a contest last year to reduce plastic shopping bag use, and Wednesday it reaped the fruits of that success. The town flipped the proverbial switch to a new 7.1 kilowatt photovoltaic system on Basalt Middle School.

Basalt topped 30 other mountain towns in the Colorado Association of Ski Towns' contest to eliminate use of plastic grocery bags. Collectively, they prevented an estimated 5.26 million bags from going into landfills.

Members of Basalt's Green Team headed the midvalley effort. Team members Tripp Adams and Kirsten Dibble Morey handed out reusable bags at the Basalt City Market and urged

shoppers to convert.

Winning the contest earned Basalt a \$10,000 grant. Both Alpine Banks and PCL Construction contributed \$5,000.

Gerry Terwilliger, another member of Basalt's Green Team, said the group wanted to construct a larger solar electric system than the grant would fund, so it raised another \$40,000 from the Community Office for Resource Efficiency in Pitkin County, the Eagle County ECO-build fund, the Aspen Skiing Co. employee Environment Foundation, Holy Cross Electric and the town of Basalt.

The solar electric system features 33 solar panels on an upper south wall of the Basalt Middle School. Kids from two science classes at the school braved chilly temperatures Wednesday to help dedicate the system. Adams said the solar electric system was a good example of how small steps can lead to big accomplishments.

He noted that the petroleum needed to produce 14 plastic grocery bags would power a car for 1 mile.

Basalt Town Manager Bill Kane said solar electric system on the school will produce enough power to offset consumption by seven to nine single-family homes.

Both Adams and Kane encouraged the kids to pay particular attention to environmental issues since they will be leading efforts in the future.