

Lawndale Teens Have Recipe for Tomorrow

Green ambassadors: Student group at charter school gains recognition as its members spread a message of environmental concern.



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GREEN AMBASSADORS: Student group at charter school gains recognition as its members spread a message of environmental concern.

By Shelly Leachman
STAFF WRITER

The recipe is simple: vegetable oil, methanol, lye. The result, biodiesel, is more complex: A fuel alternative that powers cars without producing pollution, it is also propelling some local students to star status on the environmental scene.

A group of about 30 eco-minded teens from Lawndale's Environmental Charter High School, they're known as the Green Ambassadors — and they're determined to improve the planet. Students in the group founded last fall by teacher Sara Laimon are outspo-

ken advocates for biodiesel, conservation and eliminating plastics. They frequently visit other schools, address various councils and attend conventions and community events to spread their message and recruit more members.

"We're trying to promote a new way of life. We're all on this planet together, and there's a very delicate balance," said junior Sabina Ibarra, 16. "We were put here for a reason and that reason is not to destroy the planet. We want to change things."

Their efforts are being noticed.

The Green Ambassadors were the subject of a short documentary screened at the third annual Elevate Film & Music Festival in Los Angeles in December. The Environmental Protection Agency tucked an award in the group's collective pocket in April, lauding its biodiesel efforts in particular. In June, they'll be featured in an episode of the Sundance Channel series "Big Ideas for

A Small Planet."

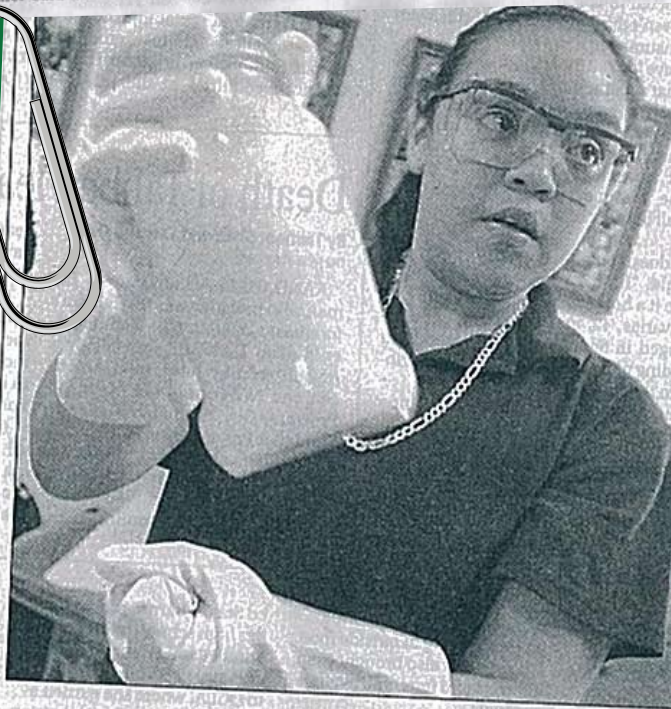
And, "every day I'm getting phone calls from magazines and people all over who want to know about us," Laimon said recently, calling her students "the future leaders of Los Angeles."

"I look at them as revolutionaries changing the world through different means," she said. "They can be the first generation to be petroleum-free, to not put oil from a different country into their cars."

Environmental Charter High operates out of a handful of rooms in Lawndale Christian Church, and in some space behind a storefront about a block up West 147th Street, just east of Hawthorne Boulevard.

Is it counterintuitive that a concrete jungle would serve as the eye of an environmental movement? Perhaps, but that's exactly what's happened, courtesy of the Green Ambassadors.

AMBASSADORS/A9



April Lopez, a student at Environmental Charter High School in Lawndale, shows a jar of biodiesel she and other members of the school's Green Ambassadors made as an alternative fuels project. The group won recognition from the Environmental Protection Agency.

ROBERT CASILLAS/
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

AMBASSADORS

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Gathered around a cavernous, cement-floored makeshift classroom one recent afternoon, the students oozed enthusiasm for their ongoing efforts, which have also included building a boat out of plastic bottles, recycled grocery bags and duct tape and visiting Brazil to study endangered giant river otters.

Almost before a visitor finished asking why they believe what they're doing is important, the teens

were calling out rapid-fire answers:

"We're a bridge to the future."

"We're creating possibilities."

"We're trying to change the world, even a little bit, by doing our part."

"We're not just sitting up here complaining — we're here to offer solutions," said junior Marlon Williams, 16, who aspires to be a doctor. "We come across a lot of people who don't think anything can be done to fix (the environment) ... but it will work if enough people try."

"We can do anything if we just make an effort."

shelly.leachman@dailybreeze.com