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Sustainability fair draws thousands

PORTSMOUTH — More than 2,000 people attended the first sustainability festival in the city Saturday afternoon, bolstering the community's claim to being an "eco-municipality."

More than 90 booths at the event, held at Portsmouth Middle School, showcased green businesses and environmental education displays. Organic food vendors set up outside.

Inside the school's gym, a life-size inflatable whale wowed a group of children, including Tim Horvath's young daughter, Ella. Horvath and his wife, Mary Ann, both of Exeter, brought items like ink cartridges and cellphones to the fair for recycling.

"We cleared up an acre of so of space (of clutter)," Horvath quipped.

Visitors were encouraged to bring recyclables, which were one way to gain entrance to the festival, along with financial donations. Once inside, people were asked to sign a "Sustainability Pledge," promising to perform an environmentally friendly act.

Portsmouth Listens Co-Chairman Jim Noucas said he was overwhelmed by the turnout and pleased with the sunny weather.

"It's a beautiful day," he said. "Mother Nature cooperated."

The festival had been planned since the beginning of the year, he added.

The goal was to create "an environment where people can come in and learn something about sustainability, and use that to make our homes — our community — more sustainable," he said.

Isabella Gerkin, 4, who attended the festival with her two sisters, Lexi and Shayla, and mother, Audrey, received a lesson on storm-water pollution at one of the education tables. She sprayed a water bottle on a miniature toy town to see a demonstration showing how rainwater can push pollutants into bodies of water downstream.

"It rains on the town, and all the (polluted) water goes into the ocean," Isabella said.

Her mother Audrey, said she brought old books from home to be recycled.

"It's my birthday," Audrey added, explaining why she took her children to the festival. "We never get to go out together."

The Portsmouth school district, Piscataqua Sustainability Initiative and Portsmouth Listens sponsored the festival.
