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TOP STORY

Athens teen raises \$10,000 to install water bottle filling stations in schools

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Messenger photo by John Halley

Claire McGee fills her water bottle with filtered water from the Athens High School cafeteria fountain.

Athens High School senior Claire McGee saw water bottle stations as a simple, yet effective, solution to help the environment and sought to put at least one filling station in each building throughout the Athens City Schools District.

Thanks to McGee's efforts and a \$9,000 sponsorship from OhioHealth, water bottle filling stations will allow 12 units to be installed with one station in each of the four elementary schools, two at Athens Middle School, and the remaining to be spread out between Athens High School and the football stadium, as stated in an OhioHealth news release.

She raised the remaining \$1,000 from soliciting local businesses and community members, including "substantial donations" from Athena Grand Movie Theater and Friendly Paws Pet Supplies and Grooming, according to the release.

McGee heads Teens4Oceans, an ocean conservation club, and wanted to do her part to help keep our waters free of pollution.

"Every year, tens of billions of plastic water bottles end up in our oceans," McGee stated in the release. "Water bottle filling stations help limit this pollution by encouraging the use of reusable, environmentally sound water bottles."

Seeing the success of water bottle filling stations already in place at Athens Community Center motivated McGee to propose installing similar stations at Athen High School to Supt. Tom Gibbs.

"This truly is a great example of student leadership in regards to Claire coming up with the idea and having the courage to bring it to my attention," Gibbs said.

Having school district support, McGee set out fundraising for the project and seeking the help of private donations. School nurse Heidi Shaw noticed the high schooler's efforts and together presented a proposal to OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital.

McGee presented her plan last April to the hospital's sponsorship committee and later received their contribution to the project.

"OhioHealth is committed to collaborating with groups that share our mission of improving the health of our community," OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital president Mark Seckinger said. "The new water bottle stations promote healthy lifestyles and help reduce waste. We couldn't be more pleased to support the great work that Teens4Oceans is doing in the Athens City School District."

McGee is grateful for the "help and enthusiasm" she's received with the project, the release stated.

"I am so thankful for all of the people who have devoted time to working with me and seeing this project through to completion," she said. "I definitely could not have accomplished all of this without the help and support of others."

More water bottling filling stations are expected to be added to Athens High School at a later date, having received a donation from last year's graduating senior class.