

## *Conservation Notes*

### **Students Decorate 19 Rain Barrels**

The Chisago Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was awarded a grant through East Central Energy's Operation Round Up program to host a classroom rain barrel decoration contest for schools in Chisago County. Nineteen rain barrels were decorated by students in grades 4 through 12 from six different schools. Classes that participated ranged from agricultural science to art to English, as well as FFA and Jr. Naturalist groups.

Each participating classroom was given a 55-gallon blue plastic rain barrel and up to \$50 to decorate it. The re-conditioned rain barrels, which originally held soybean oil, were purchased from Branch Landscaping. The barrels were converted to rain barrels by drilling holes for an overflow hose at the top and a faucet at the bottom of the barrel. There was also a larger hole cut in the top for the gutter downspout to enter. This hole was covered with fine netting so leaves and mosquitoes are unable to get inside the barrel.

As a part of the contest, teachers were asked to teach to students about local water quality and some of the issues that are affecting it. Students learned about topics varying from where groundwater goes to things we can do at home to reduce water pollution. Students worked together to decide on their design and to do the actual decorating. They also made a short record of their project that explained what they learned, how they decided to decorate the barrel, and what will happen to the barrel after the contest. Barrels will be used at the schools, or donated to people or businesses in the county that can use them.

The barrels were judged by a panel of three judges, representing the MN DNR, the Chisago SWCD, and the Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District. Judging criteria was based on four areas: creativity, artistic ability, teamwork, and the record of the project. The winning barrels exhibited outstanding work in all four areas.

The SWCD is proud to announce the contest winners. In the grades 4-6 category, there were seven rain barrels and the winning classroom was Mrs. King's fourth grade class from Lakeside Elementary School in Chisago City. Each student was given a wooden slat to decorate; the slats were then screwed into a wooden ring around the outside of the rain barrel.





In the grades 7-12 category, there were nine rain barrels and the winning classroom was Mr. Telander's 3<sup>rd</sup> hour 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class from Rush City High School. They transformed their rain barrel into a "rootbeer barrel" complete with the A&W logo. There were three rain barrels that were not finished in time for the contest; the students plan to finish these barrels on their own.

Rain barrels are a valuable tool for reducing stormwater runoff, erosion, and pollution from entering nearby streams and lakes. Water captured in rain barrels is great for watering flower pots, gardens, or landscaped areas around the house. The SWCD and the Chisago Household Hazardous Waste Facility will be teaming up to offer rain barrels and compost bins for sale to Chisago County residents this spring. Stay tuned for more information!

This contest was made possible through an Operation Round Up grant awarded by East Central Energy. Operation Round Up is a program made possible by ECE member-owners who voluntarily round up their monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. The added pennies from each participant are combined in a trust fund and awarded to various community service organizations and projects which qualify under program guidelines and approved funding categories. If you are a customer of East Central Energy, you can round up your bill by checking the box at the bottom of your next bill.

The SWCD would like to thank East Central Energy, Branch Landscaping, the judges, the teachers, and the students that made this contest possible! For more pictures of the rain barrel contest, visit <http://www.chisagoswcd.org/DataTransfer.htm>.