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Event promotes energy conservation, recycling

The first Sustainable Sumter Earth Day celebration was held Saturday at Swan Lake-Iris Gardens with live entertainment and a variety of exhibitors on hand espousing environmental education.

Sandi Floyd, an account manager with SCE&G, was telling folks about ways to save energy, such as using a tankless water heater, and how the installation of one allows for homeowner tax credits under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Engineering Specialist Henry Holland noted natural gas "is the cleanest burning fossil fuel we have," with zero greenhouse gases emitted.

Ginny Broussard and Marilyn Jenkins from Hillcrest Middle School were having a good time showing off Leggo cars fitted with solar panels. Jenkins, the school's curriculum coordinator and a science teacher, gave props to Black River Electric Co-op and Santee Cooper for installing a solar panel at the school in January as part of a \$50,000 grant. The panel is hooked to a computer allowing students to view energy output.

"We are really proud of this," she said, as several children played with the "solar derby" cars.

About 200 to 300 bows made of recycled magazine pages or newspaper were passed out to kids from the Sumter County Public Works' booth, said Patricia Miles, who had a simple message.

"Recycle for our future," she said. "It's something you can do every day."

Assistant Public Works Director Karen Hyatt was showing off photos of a 20 x 40 ft. rain garden, installed last week by the Sumter Master Gardeners at the county's gas station at their North Main Street facility. Hyatt said the next project she would like to undertake would be electronics recycling, funded by a hoped-for state grant.

City-County Planning Director George McGregor said the Liberty Center — which houses the planning and building departments and business license offices — is currently undergoing an energy use review with the help of Eaton.

"If it works here, we can hopefully continue it at other facilities," he said.

About midway through the event, Sumter Mayor Joe McElveen addressed the crowd and spoke of the value of taking a long-term view as stewards of the environment.

"It's very important for Sumter — your city is studying ways to reduce energy consumption," he said, professing the need to "leave the Earth better than we found it."

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