

AEN Hosts the GREEN BERD FESTIVAL

PRESS RELEASE

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The Armenian Environmental Network (AEN) hosted the Green Berd Festival in Soran Park in Berd as a non-official closing of the educational component of its Integrated Waste Management Project (IWMP). This was the culminating event following the training in environmental and waste management education of 10 teachers from 5 schools in Berd. It was also the first educational waste management festival ever held in Berd.

The ultimate goal of the festival, apart from that of giving an opportunity to pupils to manifest their handmade works by applying what they had learned, was to encourage the public to be more responsible for their environment and protect it by carrying out waste management and, in particular, practicing the 3 Rs – Reducing, Reusing and Recycling, as well as composting. The festival set an example for the villagers to manage their own waste and thus, step by step establish a greener community.

Based on the ideas presented in the educational guide, combined with pupils' imagination each school demonstrated art works prepared from wastes (plastic bottles, plastic bags, old CDs, old cassette tapes and records, old T-shirts and skirts, shoes, tires, etc.). The works were so creative that, at times, it was difficult to figure out what the items were made from. The pupils themselves were very enthusiastic and introduced the works of their school with great excitement. The exhibition was well appreciated by visitors to the park and one could see admiration, interest and unexpected surprise on their faces – most of them didn't expect such kind of activeness and preparedness in their city.

The pupils also created paintings in which they depicted the state of their environment and how they imagined it to be. The paintings, in general, were coloured in bright optimism, but there were also some realistic ones depicting the state of the environment in Berd and urging people to provide better environmental protection. An exhibition was also organized to display the paintings and paintings were hung from strings attached to trees at the entrance of the park to serve as a continuous reminder for visitors on the environment and its protection, prior to reaching the exhibition site.



The schools also had posters with environmental slogans encouraging the visitors to keep their environment clean and make it greener. They said: "Let's open doors to a cleaner world", "Start reusing and recycling", "Waste can be reused and recycled", "Protect the environment", "Forests are important ecosystems", "Accept the conditions of nature if you want to live in accord with it", and so on.

In addition, one of the teachers staged a short play that again called for people not to pollute but protect the environment as the "human negative impact on environment one day will return to us as a boomerang".

Face paintings were also organized and involved drawing leaves (symbolizing “green”) on the cheeks and hands of the pupils and visitors. Adjacent to the face-painting site was a poster – “Berd’s Eco Tree” where the leaves were represented by small handprints that in their turn symbolized man’s capability to take steps towards environmental protection. Thus, the visitors to the park were asked to write down some suggestions for protection measures on the handprints. Their suggestions touched upon:

- Tree planting
- Taking care of the trees
- Organizing environmental cleaning days
- Throwing the trash into the appropriate trash bins
- Keeping the environment clean
- Having more green areas
- Not polluting
- Collecting waste

AEN and Green Lane, AEN’s partner on the IWMP, prepared prizes for schools. Three schools were awarded the main prizes according to the work they presented during the festival. In order to ensure objective assessment for awards, visitors were encouraged to share their opinions as well. Thus the winners were:

- 1st place – the Art College of Berd
- 2nd place – Berd’s schools N3
- 3rd place – Berd’s schools N4

The other teachers and some active pupils were also given prizes to encourage them for their further endeavors in that field. AEN is also planning to have a contest for the Best Artwork via Facebook: an album will be created with the photos of art works and visitors will be able to vote for their preferred work. Awards will be given to the winners. In addition, AEN is planning to have the art works up for auction during Berd’s Honey and Berry Festival in August. This initiative will encourage Berd’s community to carry out waste management and benefit from it.

The Green Berd Festival was an event that drew the attention of the public to their environment and it is hoped that what they witnessed in the park will have a long lasting effect on them. AEN hopes that this environmental festival will become a tradition in Berd and that Soran Park will receive more and more visitors every year who will come and admire the exhibits, share their ideas and even learn how to reuse seemingly useless things, thus saving them from the landfill.

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AEN’s mission is to increase information sharing and engagement among Armenians, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, and the wider conservation community about environmental issues in Armenia, while facilitating environmentally sustainable development in Armenia through responsible partnerships of Diasporan and international resources. Please visit the website www.armenia-environment.org.

Photos by Armenuhi Nikoghosyan and Juliya Grigoryan