

Plastic Whale Project, 2013

Carrie Ziegler – Thurston County Solid Waste

Thank you, commissioners, for having me here today. Unfortunately, my procession costume is not yet ready, or I'd be dressed more festively.

The Procession of the Species is such an amazing part of our community. I was fortunate enough this year to have an opportunity to partner with the Procession in an education and outreach project, sponsored by Thurston County Solid Waste. Our goal: to reduce the use of plastic bags in our county.

I believe that one of the best ways to educate people about the environment is through art. With the Procession as the venue, I designed a large, collaborative art project. In essence, I have been working with schools and organizations to build a life-sized gray whale out of plastic bags and other trash.

As part of this project, I gave presentations and workshops to over 800 youth at 18 schools. These students learned that plastic in our environment is forever. They learned about the 'great pacific garbage patch', a giant plastic soup in the Pacific Ocean, the size of 2 of the state of Texas. They learned that fish, sea mammals, and birds all mistake the plastic for food and many die from eating it. Pretty much all of them agreed that they had way more plastic bags at home than they could ever reuse.

Each of these 800 students helped to create the plastic whale. And they had so much fun doing it! The skin of the whale is made out of braided plastic bags. It depicts a map of the Pacific Ocean and the great pacific garbage patch. One side of the whale is open so that you can see the skeleton of the whale, made out of disposable plastic forks and cups that are used in many school cafeterias.

The Procession of the Species is about celebrating the diversity of life. It's also about taking action to make the world a better place. By participating in a large-scale, collaborative waste-reduction project, these students know that they are part of something bigger than themselves. They have the opportunity to go to the Procession with their families and share what they learned about plastic bags. And they have a tangible action that they can

take to reduce the amount of plastic bags they use. Together, they can make a difference.

Each student who participated in the project received a reusable shopping bag. I brought a few of these whale bags along. If anyone here would like to join the youth of Thurston County in reducing our consumption of plastic bags, please grab a bag!

I'd like to thank Eli and everyone involved in the Procession of the Species for creating this amazing opportunity to teach our children, and each other. It is a beautiful and powerful celebration and I am honored to be a part of it.

Thank you.