

# Fourth-grade class takes top prize for film contest

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BRANDON — A class of fourth-graders has won \$500 in an environmental video competition for a movie they shot calling attention to the dangerous litter around their outdoor classroom.

The top prize for the Rutland County Environmental Film Competition, hosted by Brandon resident, Michael Shank, went to O'Brien's Otters for their film "Let's Make the Neshobe Woods Safe for Everyone"

Shank began the contest a few years ago aiming to boost students' skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and communicating.

"Another year of incredibly inspiring, introspective, and creative film making by local student leaders," Shank stated in an email Friday. "Films like these give me hope. The next generation of leaders already knows what's needed to protect and preserve the natural world around us. We should listen to them and take heed. I'm immensely grateful to Neshobe Elementary School and Stafford Technical Center students and teachers for their interest and involvement in this competition and encourage everyone to watch the films at [www.RutlandFilms.org](http://www.RutlandFilms.org)."

Sidney Rogers, one of the students who worked on the winning production, said his class goes outside a few times each day to the Neshobe Woods to learn. Except that when they go, they find the woods filled with litter.

"It was also a really big problem for us because we can't do everything that we want, and we can't learn safely," said Lucy Howe, another student.

Cloe Hutchins, one of O'Brien's Otters, said they believe the litter has been there for a long time.

"We think there used to be a farm there, and when it went away all of the garbage that was left that they scattered around was left in the woods," said Max Lavelle, another of the students.

They hope their video will spur some action.

"We made that video to show people that there's a whole bunch of trash in the woods and try to get help cleaning it up," said student Tucker Cram.

Lucy Howe and Bryce Abare said they learned that video projects are easier when several people are helping each other work on them.

“It was fun,” said Howe. “I’d like to make more videos. Some people are making more right now, just not about the problem in Neshobe Woods.”

Their teacher, Laura O’Brien, said she’d heard about this project from Hannah Fjeld, library media specialist at Neshobe, and initially thought it sounded a little overwhelming, but as it turns out, the kids in her fourth-grade class learn quite rapidly, especially technology.

Also, they had the perfect topic for the contest.

“We were going out into our outdoor classroom since the beginning of the year as a way to be hands-on with our science and social studies, to get outside and give the students a chance to socially distance, take their masks off, and be in this really therapeutic space that the woods can be,” she said. “But then these problems kept coming up, like all the garbage. I had to keep them away from certain areas, and then once the snow fell the snow was covering where the garbage was, so we really couldn’t use the woods hardly at all because those dangerous pieces were hidden from view.”

The third- and fourth-grade classes at Neshobe do many things together, she said.

Each class chooses a name for itself based on an animal that lives in the area, hence the fourth-graders’ moniker, O’Brien’s Otters.

She said the Otters, through this project, learned how to plan a video that will make a point and how to edit it together.

“Part of what they’ve learned, they don’t realize yet,” she said. “I think a few years down the road, just the process of creating this, all the skills aside, those things will start to emerge for them.”

The class is still working on figuring out how to use its \$500 prize money, she said.

Taking second place in the film contest were Austin Gallagher, and Grant Doenges, students at Stafford Technical Center, for their film “COVID-19 Has Changed Us.” Taking third in the contest was Isaac James and Seth McCutcheon, also of Stafford Tech, with their film, “Our New World — How Our Environment Has Changed.”