



SLOWING GLOBAL WARMING WITH THE “IDLE FREE” GIRLS

By Anne Lindsey

“The Idle Free Girls”. Next year’s headline act at the Winnipeg Folk Festival?

No, actually they are a group of Grade Six students at Stonewall Centennial School in Stonewall, Manitoba committed to helping the planet and slowing global warming. They are Eco-Journal’s newest “Climate Champions”.

Rachel, Destiny, Katelyn and Neely are on a mission to make Stonewall “idle free”, and they’ll talk to anyone who will listen about how important, and how easy this is. So far, their audiences have included such notables as the Town Council and the School Division trustees. The Chamber of Commerce is next on their agenda.

The girls have been successful in getting the colourful “Healthy Communities Don’t Idle” signs posted all over their community: at the rink, the soccer field, churches, the schools and Stonewall Quarry Park. They are also inspiring others to act: the high school environment group in Teulon is considering a similar campaign.

They were motivated to start their efforts after viewing *An Inconvenient Truth* last year in school, and engaging in discussions with their teacher, Kari Kinley. There’s a debate about how suitable the film is for this age group, and indeed some of their Grade 5 counterparts found it “boring”. These girls however, were fired up and ready to go with some action of their own, probably due in no small part to the influence of Ms. Kinley who is committed to environmental education. They agree that she has been very

helpful and supportive to them in getting the project going. They also credit Climate Change Connection’s Susan Lindsay for talking to them, and providing lots of useful information, along with brochures, stickers and signs.

Besides the broad goal of “helping the planet”, the Idle Free Girls also aim to ensure that Stonewall does not become as polluted as larger centres. They’ve created their own display, which they use at community events to reach out to the general public, and they believe their efforts are making a difference – not as many people are idling in Stonewall, they say, since they started the campaign. “Every bit counts” asserts Katelyn.

Asked what they would say to other kids, they answer (in unison – many of their answers are in unison) “get involved!” Kids can start their own campaigns, and can tell their parents to turn off the car. And what are they telling adults? Well, turn off the car to start with, but do more: car pool more on the way to work (many Stonewall residents commute to Winnipeg), consider hybrid cars, use your bike, walk!

The Idle Free Girls, and Kari Kinley, provide a great example of how citizens of any age can become involved in protecting the planet. See more pictures on Climate Change Connection’s newly designed website at www.climatechangeconnection.org