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### Worms Plan Visit to Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School

Keep Oak Park Beautiful has partnered with Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School to develop a pilot program for vermicomposting -- a system for turning food waste into potting soil with the help of worms. Students will work with staff to make sure that the worms are "eating right" and teachers will include a vermicomposting unit in the science curriculum. One hundred thirty students are involved in the project along with three teachers and the school's chief engineer.

The four worm bins, eight pounds of worms and educational materials are being purchased with grant funds received from Keep Illinois Beautiful and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Approximately \$2,000 of the \$5,000 grant will be dedicated to this learning project. The rest of the grant money will go towards the business district's gum-buster program and outdoor recycling containers.

Members of the Oak Park Environment and Energy Commission support the project, calling the fall kick-off event "Halfway to Earth Day" in an effort to promote environmental awareness throughout the school year. An Earth Day celebration is planned for April 2006 when the *castings*, or nutrient-rich soil, created by the worms will be used to enhance landscaped areas around the school.

This project was started when teacher Gale Liebman approached Village waste/recycling manager Karen Rozmus about teaching students about the importance of protecting the environment. Rozmus, a former vermicomposter herself, was glad to provide the assistance. "I love working with the schools because of the enthusiasm and willingness of the students," Rozmus said. "After all, they are our future."

If successful, Rozmus hopes to help implement the vermicomposting program in other Oak Park schools. An assembly on vermicomposting, litter prevention and recycling is planned for Tuesday, September 13 at Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School.

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