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A lead role in the Environment

Green Woods Charter School featured in educational program

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By David Grow

On Feb. 2, The Green Woods Charter School and the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education hosted a preview of director Carlos Fink's **ePLANET – Rainforest Quest/Central America**, a children's educational program designed to engage children in learning about the environment.

The program, shot on location in the rainforests of Central America, features a segment involving the students of Green Woods Charter School, and connects them to a group of students in Belize who are also learning the tenants of conservation.

Fink's goal was to produce a series which would help tell the positive stories regarding nature and the environment to children. This contrasts with the typical attitude of nature programs, which often express a feeling that it is too late to make a difference. He hopes also to make a local connection which kids, who can view both the foreign and local students as similar to themselves.

"If you want to inspire people to actually do something, you have to give them hope," said Fink.

The use of students from Green Woods Charter School helps to show the viewers that local forests and natural landscapes are just as important as the ones we only see on TV. Fink also takes special care to ensure his program does not include politics or finger pointing, and focuses entirely on positive groups and activities.

The program features two 3d animated kids, which will allow them to be replaced in the future for translating the program into different languages and cultures.

Locally, this program will be used to publicize the connection between the Schuylkill Center and Green Woods Charter School. Green Woods Charter School also hopes, in the future, to use the program to be able to link schools across the country, allowing the children and faculty to learn from each other. The ePLANET program also ties in with the website **www.eplanetkids.com** to provide a multimedia learning platform.

The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education opened in 1965 as the Schuylkill Valley Nature Center. It was one of the first environmental education centers in the United States that was situated in an urban setting, and has been leading the way

for urban environmentalism ever since. The property has over 340 acres of land preserved for natural and educational purposes. The center has four miles of hiking trails, and educational programs for students from kindergarten to graduate level. The Education Building features laboratories, a children's exhibit (The Discovery Center), a bookstore, classrooms, and the Green Woods Charter School. The grounds are also home to a butterfly house, an environmental art trail, a native plant nursery, forest restoration projects, and the Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic, which cares for injured animals and provides wildlife education to visitors.

The Green Woods Charter School opened at the Schuylkill Center in 2002, with unique combination of classroom and outdoor learning. The school operates on the No Child Left Inside philosophy, which gets students outside, learning about their natural environment. Environmental stewardship and conservation are taught to be second nature, not something out of the ordinary. This encourages the students to take the skills learned beyond the classroom and with them after they graduate. The kids at the school work with the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education to learn and perform conservation projects, as well as with various community organizations to help improve our local woods.

For more information about ePlanet, contact Steve Thompson at steve@thomcomm.net. Visit www.greenwoodscharter.org and www.schuylkillcenter.org to find out what's going on at the Schuylkill Center and Green Woods Charter School.

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