

Parting with plastic: students lead discussions, film screening events

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Pemetic Elementary School eighth-graders Logan Wilbur, left, and Charlotte Partin present their service learning project focused on banning single-use plastic bags to the Tremont Board of Selectmen in June. [Islander photo by Sarah Hinckley]

SOUTHWEST HARBOR — Mount Desert Island High School freshmen Caroline Musson, Logan Wilbur, Charlotte Partin, and Ella Izenour are set to present their research about plastic pollution and screen a condensed version of the documentary “A Plastic Ocean” at four events in October. The students will also speak about a citizen initiative underway in all four MDI towns to ban single-use plastic bags and polystyrene (a.k.a. Styrofoam).

The gatherings are set for Wednesday, Oct. 3 at 5:30 p.m. at the Northeast Harbor Library; Saturday, Oct. 13 at 2 p.m. at Reel Pizza; Tuesday, Oct. 16 at 5:30 p.m. at the Jesup Memorial Library and Wednesday, Oct. 17 at 5:30 p.m. at the Southwest Harbor Public Library.

Last year, the then-eighth graders from Pemetic Elementary did research about the effects of plastic waste on the environment and public health and became impassioned advocates for the elimination of single use plastic bags.

They presented their research to the Southwest Harbor Town Meeting in May and subsequently presented to the select boards in Mount Desert and Tremont and the town council in Bar Harbor.

A Climate to Thrive is hosting the events, along with the students, the Town of Mount Desert's Sustainability Committee and the Citizens Initiative for Reducing Plastics on MDI.

"We're not trying to tell people what to do," Wilbur told the Islander earlier this year. "It's our future, and it's something we need to fight for."

California banned single-use plastic bags in 2016. There are 14 other towns in Maine that have already banned single-use plastic bags, including Portland, Freeport and Blue Hill.

"Once people start to make a change, then others see, oh, this is possible," said Izenour.

"The best thing is seeing how empowered these girls are," said Pemetec science teacher Bonnie Norwood, who supervised the students' service learning project on the topic in the spring. It's important "to have students be aware of their own town government and how to get an ordinance [drafted]. I'm learning too."