



For the second year in a row, students from Phoebe Pittman's eight-grade science class at Charles City Middle School won a phase of the Lexus Eco Challenge. The EcoDudes (pictured with Pittman) earned the honor by promoting recycling in local hotels. Pictured from left: (front row) Tate Jaeger and Samuel Lynch; (back row) Pittman, Jacob Page and Gabe Fortunato. Not pictured is Connor West. — Press photo by Giles Bruce

## CCMS students do it again — win Lexus Eco Challenge award

**By Giles Bruce**  
Staff Writer

For the second year in a row, students from Charles City Middle School's eighth-grade science class have won the first phase of the Lexus Eco Challenge, a competition where kids from across the country come up with ideas to better the environment.

The winning team, "EcoDudes," consisted of eighth graders Gabe Fortunato, Tate Jaeger, Samuel Lynch, Jacob Page and Connor West. Their idea, which netted them \$10,000: giving recycling tips to local hotel

guests.

Inside Sherman House Bed and Breakfast, 800 Gilbert St. in Charles City, and Hartwood Inn, 1312 Gilbert St. in Charles City, guests will find large tote bags embroidered with "Recycle." People staying at the hotels now have a place to put used pop cans, bottles and newspapers, which will be disposed of by the front desk clerks, all thanks to the EcoDudes.

Most hotel rooms don't have recycling bins in them. In fact, that's how the EcoDudes got their inspiration for the project:

On top of looking at ideas that would reach a lot of people — locals and out-of-towners — as well as better the community, the five students realized that while all of them recycle at home, none do on vacation.

Besides the tote bags, which can be reused and washed, the boys also made information cards to be displayed in the guest rooms explaining how to limit water usage in the shower or while brushing your teeth.

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## Charles City team won last year, too

### Eco Challenge

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The EcoDudes had about six weeks to complete the "Land/Water" challenge. (The team decided not to participate in the second challenge, "Air/Climate.") They had to choose a topic from a list that included landfills, endangered species, water conservation and recycling. They were one of two in their region, for a total of eight nationwide, to win in the middle school division.

Dividing up the prize money, each EcoDude will receive \$1,400, while \$2,000 goes to the middle school and \$1,000 is awarded to Pittman. The \$1,400 does, to the boys' dismay, actually go to their parents. Six teams from Pittman's science class competed in the challenge, and

\$30,000, which explains why so many more decided to give it a whirl this time around. The Smarticles, last year's winner — one of eight first-place teams nationwide — did their final project on what a carbon footprint is and how people can reduce theirs.

The Smarticles' victory showed other students "that people really do win," Pittman said. They thought, "Wow, there's really a possibility I could do this."

So why have Pittman's students been so successful in the Eco Challenge?

"I get really lucky and have really good students," she said. "They have an interest in the environment. They're really competitive."

And it's not like Pittman held their hands throughout the whole project. While she met with them

and made videos, all to get their message across. They even had to pitch their idea to local hotel operators.

"They gave up a lot of lunch time," Pittman said. "They were willing to do a lot of work."

When asked how it feels to win the challenge, Fortunato responded, "It's good." One of his teammates then joked that since it's taking so long to send the money, Lexus should just send them each a car.

In 2010, the EcoDudes will have another chance at a cash prize — \$15,000, to be exact — as they plan to partake in the third and final challenge, which starts Feb. 3 and ends March 12. The "Dudes," who will compete against 16 other teams from across the U.S., have already been brainstorming ideas. One possibility: prairie restoration.