



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FRANKLIN STUDENT TURNS ENVIRONMENTAL PASSION INTO ACTION

Uniontown, PA – A Franklin Elementary School student is on a mission to save the planet – one plastic bag at a time.

Luke Hamaker, 10, of Smock, partnered with Keep Fayette County Green and Franklin Township to take on the NexTrex Recycling Challenge, in the hopes of earning a park bench made from recycled materials for his school.

Luke, a Uniontown Area School District third-grade student, kicked off his challenge on America Recycles Day, Nov. 15, and aimed to collect the required minimum of 1,000 pounds of plastic bags and other film plastics within one year. However, with his classmates and community behind him, he nearly doubled his goal in just six weeks.

"I would like to thank everybody for their support and help toward Luke's goals," his mother, Melissa Hamaker said. "We have such a great community, and we are so appreciative of each and everyone. We couldn't have done it without you."

Luke's family describes him as a "very bright and kind kid" who's "always overcoming obstacles," such as his father's passing and living with Autism Spectrum Disorder. He regularly volunteers in his community and has a "passion for recycling," which has been fueled by family and friends collecting scrap metal and other recyclable materials for him over the last three years.

Melissa Hamaker said her son "loves Fayette Waste," his community refuse haulers, and that "garbage day" is his "favorite part of the week." Luke helps his neighbors with yard work, collects trash from his local streets in his wagon, volunteers at the Vanderbilt Recycling Center and even provided his own recycling bins for Franklin Elementary School's programming.

"I feel as if he's showing maturity, dedication and drive to take this initiative on at such a young age," Melissa Hamaker said. "He just amazes me daily. I'm so proud to be his mom."

Luke celebrated his 10th birthday by touring the Fayette County Recycling Convenience Center and Fayette County's hauler/processor Carry All Products/Superior Fine Grind of South Connellsville. He was inducted as the latest Fayette County Recycling Ranger before deciding to take on the NexTrex Recycling Challenge.

"We're extremely fortunate to have wonderful and dedicated kids, like Luke, in our communities. He genuinely cares about saving our environment and wants to make a difference," Fayette County

Recycling Coordinator/Stormwater Manager Sheila Shea said. "Luke has been an absolute joy to work with, and we're so grateful to call him one of our recycling rangers. He's already inspiring children from other schools to take on the challenge and organize recycling efforts in their communities. He's a great ambassador for us because he believes in keeping Fayette County clean and green."

Luke held his first community collection at the Franklin Township Municipal Building and his second at the recycling center, crushing his goal with a total of 1,894 pounds of recyclables by mid-January. He has since collaborated with Franklin Township supervisors to surpass his goal for a second bench and is well on his way to a third.

On Tuesday, Franklin Elementary students enjoyed a recycling education program from the Pennsylvania Resources Council and a visit from Rascal the Recycling Raccoon, Keep Fayette County Green's mascot, before Luke's park bench was unveiled. Recycling, school and community representatives, along with state and local legislators, the Hamaker family and friends gathered for the ceremony and honored Luke with proclamations for his efforts.

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Scott Dunn said Luke is "the perfect example" of "Fayette County's bright future."

"We're extremely fortunate that our school districts have embraced recycling and protecting their environment, because they're proactively preserving their future. Luke's passion for his community is evident, and we're proud of his monumental accomplishment," Dunn said. "Thank you, Luke, for wanting to make a difference for your friends and neighbors. Fayette County is lucky to have you."

Commissioner Vince Vicites congratulated Luke on "a job well done" and said his efforts are "much appreciated."

"I think it's very important to connect with our schools and get young people involved in recycling at an early age," Vicites said. "Luke took a real interest, and it's great to see this type of effort from our young people."

Commissioner Dave Lohr said Luke having the "grit and determination" to achieve his goal is "impressive and speaks to his character."

"Just consider the life lesson that Luke has learned – that one person really can make a difference – and how Luke living out that lesson presents a shining example for everyone around him. Today, we're acknowledging Luke's work to save the environment, but – whatever the issue – it's great to see young people getting involved," Lohr said. "For anyone who believes the youth of today don't care about anything beyond their own interests, Luke can proudly stand up and say, 'I care!' Kudos to Luke, his family, friends and teachers; because they've inspired this interest in Luke, and they've provided the support necessary to the project."

To learn more about the NexTrex Recycling Challenge, visit www.nextrex.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettedcountypa.org.

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