

Environment**Local public resource bottled for profit**

by Hannah Abelbeck

While water is bottled in Centre County with local spring water, the bottled water on campus is trucked in from other watersheds.

According to David Gingham, Director of Campus Retail and Dining at Penn State, Penn State consumes 1.8 million bottles of Aquafina for about \$2.7 million in sales including campus sales, Beaver Stadium, and the Bryce Jordan Center.

Both the Penn State Office of the Physical Plant and the State College Borough Water Authority draw water from wells that tap into the groundwater that flows beneath Centre County. That water flows out of a spring in Bellefonte, known as the Big Spring. Water from Big Spring supplies public drinking water to Bellefonte and Milesburg.

CCDA Waters LLC, a division of Coca Cola, uses water from the same groundwater source for its bottled water. It pipes water 27,500 feet, about 5 miles, from Big Spring to its Milesburg bottling facility, according to an application for Public Water Supply permits filed with the state in 2002 under the Pennsylvania Safe Drinking Water Act. North of I-80, CCDA bottles the "fresh spring water" and then sells it back to consumers under brand names including Dannon Spring Water, Enon Springs, Crystal Lake Spring Water, Pure American, and Dasani. The plant also bottles for Giant Food Markets and Walgreens.

On the other hand, the Aquafina offered at campus events with Wytheville, Va. on the label is bottled in Harrisburg, and the water comes from the municipal water system. Public water in Harrisburg comes from a number of sources. Water from the DeHart Dam is treated by the Harrisburg Water Authority. Other Harrisburg water comes from the Susquehanna River, Stony Creek or Swatara Creek, and is treated by United Water, a subsidiary of Suez, a French-based multinational corporation who is a world leader in water system privatization.

This August, United Water acquired the permit to provide water to parts of Luzerne County. While residents of Luzerne sup-

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plied by the Pennsylvania American Water Co will see their rates increase 6 percent next year, United Water is proposing a rate hike of 16.2 percent, reported the Wilkes-Barre Times Leader. In September, United Water was cited in an Australian Supreme Court case in which the South Australian government claims its subsidiary overcharged customers "tens of millions of dollars" in order to finance international investments, including "all of its corporate overhead costs, including those relating to United Water's operations in New Zealand and Ballarat." United Water has countersued, alleging that its actions were legal. Suez supplies water to 76 million people, according to its website.

While bottled water and drinking water come from the same source, that doesn't necessarily mean that they are the same. Instead of using chlorine, the cheapest and most effective disinfectant, many bottling plants, including CCDA, use ozonation and UV treatment to disinfect water if it hasn't already been treated. This process does make a slight difference in taste, although it is more expensive and uses more energy.

In 2005, Penn State Environmental Systems Engineering student Josh Hull and his labmates did a chemistry experiment on the hardness of Aquafina, Dasani, Poland Springs, Evian, and tap water from Millheim, Pa. While they found that the public drinking water from Millheim was less hard than some of the waters they tested, they concluded that "water manufacturers are using methods to soften the water before it is sold...these manufacturers prefer to sell the water at a hardness below the state average."

Aquafina bottles from campus vending machines sport a generic label with the address of the Pepsi Co. Inc. headquarters in Purchase, NY. Aquafina is also bottled in

Johnstown, Pa.

3E-COE's Take Back the Tap campaign to discourage bottled water use and end PSU's contract with Pepsi for Aquafina, an event covered by the Daily Collegian and Voices in October, caught the attention of the bottled water industry. "Tap water will always hold an important place in our society, from sanitation to irrigation. But not everyone enjoys the smell or taste of chlorine. Still others enjoy the crisp, slightly mineral flavor of some natural bottled waters," wrote Tom Lauria of the International Bottled Water Association in an Oct. 16th letter to the Collegian. "The issue at hand is consumer choice."

After 15 years of advertising that trumpets the superiority of bottled water, not only are consumers ignorant about where their bottled water comes from, they might not be aware of the degree to which they are placing convenience and taste over environmental concerns and their financial self interest. Consumers concerned about taste can refrigerate their water, since temperature makes a big difference. Water filters on reusable containers are another choice the

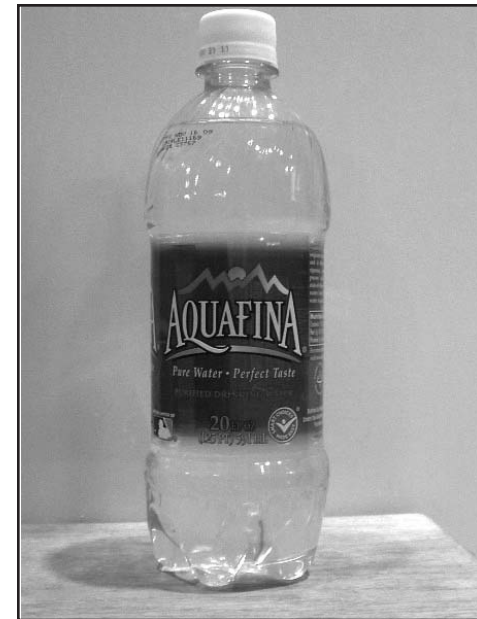


Photo by Jill Gomez

Bottles like this one may contain water from dubious sources.

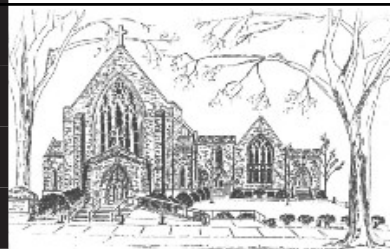
industry seldom mentions.

"Critics vociferously challenged bottled water with respect to its negative environmental impact as well as, for some brands, its very nature as filtered municipal tap water," in 2007 and 2008, said the firm Markets and Research in a report for the industry. IBWA is "now promoting bottled water, not as a rival to tap water, but as a healthier alternative to other beverages on the market," the firm reports.

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PASA cultivates membership with new Web site

by John Huffstetler

Pictures featuring local farmers placed before a background of amber waves of grain greet visitors of the recently updated Web site for the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, a statewide organization based in Millheim.

The site offers members and non-members alike a user-friendly and informative tool to connect with each other and learn more about sustainable agriculture.

"All consumers should care about where their food comes from and where it is being produced," PASA Membership Director Michele Gauger said.

The Web site is interesting, but not overdone, and its organization is very clear and easy to navigate. Important links are found in the header and to the left in the Tool Shed sidebar, a clever name matching the agricultural focus.

Looking at the Inside PASA page, visitors learn that "as the largest statewide, member-based sustainable farming organization in the United States, [PASA] seeks to improve the economic viability, environmental soundness and social responsibility of food and farming systems in

"All consumers should care about where their food comes from and where it is being produced."

--Michele Gauger,
PASA Membership Director

Pennsylvania and across the country." The Web site helps achieve these goals.

Gauger, who oversaw development of the site, said she wanted more control over the its content. Now she can instantly update information, such as policy changes and upcoming events, allowing for the most current and accurate information. This ability to update is critical with such a variety of services offered through the Web site.

The homepage gives a brief introduction to PASA, contains a Members Spotlight section, and lists PASA news. There are also links to the Farmer's Almanac and PASA's image gallery.

Through the site's Our Work page, visitors can learn more about sustainable agriculture and PASA's specific initiatives. The Farming for the Future Conference, "one of the largest and most respected gatherings on this topic anywhere in the U.S.," PASA

claims, helps educate people through intensive learning programs, or workshops. The site also lists Partners of PASA, such as Buy Fresh Buy Local and the Good Food Neighborhood, which help consumers connect with local farms. Links to these partners' Web sites can be found on the Tool Shed sidebar.

Visitors can read past editions of PASA's newsletter, Passages, through the Resources page. Passages includes "technical information of immediate use to farmers and growers with thought-provoking articles and ideas for rural and urban readers," as well as "a calendar of events, classified ads, and editorials."

Using the Tool Shed sidebar, members can view the Events Calendar. There they can register for events, such as the 24th Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference being held Dec. 4. Other upcoming events

include Digging Deep: An Advanced Soils Course for Vegetable Growers on Jan. 5 and 2010 Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms Conference Jan. 20.

Gauger hopes the changes will attract new members and keep current members better informed. More than 4,800 members are currently registered at the site, she said. Half of these members are directly involved with farming, but membership is encouraged for anyone interested in supporting sustainable agriculture. The audience already includes producers, consumers, students, nonprofits, and business owners. One third of PASA's members reside out of state, Gauger said.

Membership benefits include discounted admission to the annual conference, invitations to special events, and "the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping sustain agriculture," Gauger said.

Gauger said PASA hopes to complete a members-only area featuring a community bulletin board by late spring or early summer of next year. This section would allow members a forum to exchange ideas and discuss issues highlighted in the newsletter.

Juncos revisit favorite winter feeders in local area

by Alice L. Fuller

Several inches of snow on our patio failed to daunt one of the first feathered arrivals early in the morning after a winter snowfall. Known to many as "snowbirds" the little chaps quickly spotted the area shoveled and sprinkled with bird seed. Several years ago after the checklist of birds had been read at a meeting of the State College Bird Club, a newcomer asked why it did not include a "snowbird." Someone kindly explained that what she referred to as a "snowbird" is actually the dark-eyed junco.

The junco has earned the nickname of "snowbird" for, as John V. Dennis points out in his book "A Complete Guide to Bird Feeding," this species is most likely to turn up at feeders during the worst winter weather. "Driving winds and swirling snow do not daunt this plucky bird. The coldest winter days see the junco blithely hopping about near out doorsteps and awaiting the first



handouts of the day."

Juncos do seem to reflect the wintry skies with the blackish hoods of the males and grayer ones of females and immature birds contrasting with white bellies. Juncos also have white outer tail feathers which flash conspicuously when they fly away. Dorothy Bordner's drawing of a dark-eyed junco shows the white outer tail feathers of a bird taking off and also the junco's dark eye. Specialists believe that the white tail feathers on ground-loving birds are a safety feature. The flash of white catches the attention of predators and the bird may escape with only the loss of a few feathers rather than its life. Other birds with this safety net include vesper

sparrows, longspurs, pipits and meadowlarks.

Some folks who have been feeding birds for a long time may be confused with the name, dark-eyed junco, for they have known this pleasing small bird as slate-colored junco. However, several years ago the slate-colored junco was determined by ornithologists to be the same species as three western species of junco—the Oregon, white-winged and gray-headed juncos—and was renamed "dark-eyed" junco. If breeding ranges overlap and birds interbreed, they usually are considered the same species. Not that the bird cares one whit what we choose to call it but changes in birds' names does complicate birding for the dedicated birder and must be utter confusion for the beginning birdwatcher.

In our part of the country the former slate-colored junco is one of the most common visitors in winter to bird feeding stations. Juncos pick up sunflower scraps other birds have dropped from hanging feeders or dine



on fine corn scratch we have scattered on the patio. According to Dennis's book juncos also like millet, thistle and canary seeds and nutmeats. While they may visit a variety of feeders—even small hanging ones—still they mainly prefer to scratch a living from the ground.

Like the tiny chickadee, the junco is a bird which appears to have a good deal of "joie de

see Junco, pg. 17

Use plastics responsibly to diminish plastic waste

by Heather Simmons

Pervasive plastic use throughout modern society poses a conundrum: although the use of plastic undoubtedly makes our lives much more convenient it can also be extremely detrimental to the environment. Thus the question becomes, how to use plastics responsibly?

Plastics not only cause harm to the environment during production, in terms of natural resource use and toxic chemical emissions, but during disposal as well. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the amount of plastic in total solid waste has increased 12 percent between 1960 and 2007. This plastic waste not only takes up space in our landfills, but also leaches toxic chemicals into our soil and water.

Plastic waste also wreaks havoc in



marine ecosystems. Not only have we created massive floating garbage dumps in the ocean such as the Pacific Ocean gyre that is estimated to be twice the size of Texas, but plastic litter in the ocean is thought to kill about 100,000 marine animals a year who either try to eat the plastics or become entangled in them.

Plastics can also be detrimental to our health as they can leach toxic chemicals into our food when subjected to heat. It is important to note that microwave and dishwasher safe mean only that the container will not melt in the microwave. They will still leach chemicals into your food when heated.

Unfortunately, completely non-petroleum-based, non-leaching, biodegradable plastics are not yet available, but what we can do is pay attention to which particular plastics we are purchasing, and reduce our use of the plastics that are most toxic to our health and the environment. Plastics are stamped with a recycling code number that can be used to identify the level of environmental and health effects that they have:

The most environmentally friendly plastics:

Number 1 is polyethylene terephthalate (PET or PETE), which is thought to be the safest single-use plastic (e.g. soda bottles) and is recyclable. However these types of containers are not considered safe for multiple use as not only does the PET breakdown but they cannot be cleaned properly which can lead to a build-up of

bacteria.

Number 2 is high-density polyethylene (HDPE) used for items such as plastic bags and cereal box liners and is accepted by most curbside recycling programs. This is considered to be a low risk plastic in terms of leaching.

Number 4 is low-density polyethylene (LDPE), which is used to make items such as bread bags and squeezable bottles. This plastic transmits no known toxins into food and is recyclable.

Number 5 is polypropylene (PP) and is used for items such as straws and yogurt containers. Although it is not as recyclable as numbers 1 and 2, it has not been shown to leach any carcinogens or endocrine disruptors.

see Plastic waste, pg. 17

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from JUNCO, pg. 15

vivre” and seems undaunted by winter’s harsh weather. During pleasant, sunny weather they may spend their time roaming weedy fields and woodland borders but let it rain or snow and they swarm back to the luxury of feeders. By banding juncos Mr. Dennis discovered that there are a few old-timers in every flock and he thinks these individuals have a canny memory of exactly where food can be found in bad weather.

For a long time I associated juncos only with winter. By early spring they disappear from the yard and I had presumed they headed to breeding grounds much farther north. However, back in the 1980’s when I worked on the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas, I had to revise my thinking. It did not take long to discover that the junco is a common nesting bird in our woodlands especially in the higher elevations. According to “The Birds of Pennsylvania” by McWilliams and

Brauning, “Juncos are fairly common to common in the forests of the northern Ridge and Valley, Glaciated Northeast, and High Plateau locally south through the Allegheny Mountains to the state line.” While birding on such favorite roads as Six-Mile Run or around Black Moshannon State Park we usually see a junco or hear the thin trill of its song.

The account in “The Birds of Pennsylvania” notes that migration begins in late September and peaks from the third week of October to the second week of November. Sometime during that period juncos will begin to appear in our yard to become regular visitors all winter long.

Food for fuel, feathers for warmth, and shelter in a hole or a thick growth of evergreen help such overwintering birds survive in a frigid and inhospitable environment. I have few doubts that the foods we dispense and the trees and shrubs we plant make life just a tad easier for many winter bird residents such as the dark-eyed junco.

from Plastic waste, pg. 16

Environmentally unsafe plastics:

Number 3 is polyvinyl chloride (PVC), and is sometimes found in food containers and plastic wrap and has been nicknamed the “toxic plastic,” as long-term exposure may cause cancer and other health issues. It is best to use containers that contain PVC for non-food items.

Number 6 is polystyrene (PS), which is used to make Styrofoam. PS can leach styrene, which is a possible human carcinogen, and may also disrupt hormone function.

Number 7 is polycarbonate plastic, which is used in nalgene containers. This plastic may pose serious health risks. This plastic contains bisphenol A, a known hormone disruptor, which has been linked to heart disease, diabetes, obesity, as well as breast, uterine and prostate cancer.

The EPA estimates that of the 30.7 million tons of plastic generated in 2007 less than 7 percent was recycled. Recycling plastic uses about 10 percent of the energy that it takes to make a pound of plastic from new materials.

So it is important to not only pay attention to what types of plastics you are purchasing but to recycle the plastics that you use. Although Centre County currently has a curbside recycling program it is limited in the types of plastics that it currently accepts for recycling. According to the Web site the county accepts narrow neck plastic bottles, jugs and jars only, and does not accept tubs or trays, margarine or

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yogurt containers, buckets or plastic cups.

As with most environmental issues the three Rs are fundamental to plastic use: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Reduce your reliance on plastic as much as possible. For example, use a tote bag at the grocery store instead of a single use plastic bag, or use a non-plastic water bottle. Our excessive plastic water bottle usage accounts for 1.5 million tons of plastic waste each year. Not only is this disastrous for the environment, but the water sold in water bottles can be a safety issue as well. An extremely good alternative to purchasing bottled water is to use a water filter, which is not only more environmentally friendly than bottled water but cheaper, too.

Reuse only those plastics that are safe for multiple uses, or use them for non-food purposes. For example, single use plastic bags can be reused as trash bags, and plastic containers can be used to store non-food items.

Recycle your plastics as much as possible, and make an effort to buy products that are made from recycled plastics. *Please post comments or suggestions at www.voicesweb.org.*

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