



Passion for the Planet

Seniors Zaara Baig and Brandi Bates have fun with the plants in the new rain garden next to the mobiles where they will plant more new native plants this year for Environmental Club. Photo by Elizabeth Tran.

“For me, [to] care about the environment, you don’t have to be an environmental teacher or a water quality sampler,” senior Zaara Baig said “It’s something you can apply in everything you do.”

Baig has taken this position and run with it, poised to make a difference in the school and the planet through her new position as president of the Environmental Club and hoping to show that anyone can make a difference in the environment. Her passion and drive come from her childhood experiences which have shaped her outlook on the world.

“My passion came from my piano teacher,” Baig said. “She has a huge love for the environment, and she got me started with my home garden, allowing me to have a connection with the food I eat and the world around me.”

These experiences sparked a

passion for the environment and the planet that led Baig to take charge of the club at the beginning of this year, seeing a clear need for leadership and change.

“I went to Mr. Ollig’s room and he said it kind of fell apart last year because there were some seniors that were really involved and there weren’t many underclassmen,” Baig said. “I asked if I could get it started again and just brought him some ideas of things we could accomplish, and we just started having meetings and started talking about ideas.”

Inspiration for revitalizing the club came from Baig’s experience at the Brown University Environmental Leadership Lab, a two-week summer camp, which allows students to learn about environmental issues and engage themselves in the study of environmental science.

“It [the program] was really cool because we were basically camping,” Baig said. “All the learning activities

were hands on, and I learned way more about issues. I came back really wanting to change things in my personal life and other people’s lives as well,” Baig said.

Baig immediately translated her experiences at the camp into the club, creating a clear platform for the organization that is focused on making a difference in the school and the community. A main goal for the group is the elimination of styrofoam trays from the cafeteria, something that Baig believes is very important.

“Styrofoam is non-biodegradable and won’t go away over a very long period of time,” Baig said. “I can’t believe our school contributes the amount of styrofoam we do to the environment and has done it for so long; I think it’s just disgusting.”

Apart from encouraging the use of plastic trays, Baig and the Environmental Club plan to participate in litter pick ups,

visit a recycling center and work with the Leawood City Sustainability Committee to promote environmental consciousness. All these projects, coupled with her leadership and hard work, have made Baig the subject of praise from her peers and fellow Environmental Club members.

“The Environmental Club could not ask for a better president,” senior and Environmental Club member Jessica Toney said. “Zaara is so determined and has really inspired everyone and brought so many new people to help. It’s amazing because as an underclassman I had never heard of the Environmental Club, but Zaara has put a lot of work into it, and the club has started making an impact.”

Baig’s leadership style is seen through her personality and motivation, which have both been instrumental in getting the club on its feet.