

## **Suffolk Student Welders Build LOVE Sign for Regional Recycling Awareness** **The traveling public art display to hit the road with askHRgreen.org on Earth Day!**

(Hampton Roads, Virginia, April 13, 2023) – When instructor Tom Shirk invited members of his high school welding program to collaborate on a special assignment, they really put their heart into it. Shirk and students from Suffolk Public Schools' College & Career Academy at Pruden will unveil the 8' x 5' LOVE sign on Earth Day with the team that commissioned the artwork— [askHRgreen.org](http://askHRgreen.org) and TFC Recycling.



The “reveal” will take place Saturday, April 22, during the Suffolk Earth and Arts Festival at Westminster Reformed Presbyterian Church, 3488 Godwin Blvd. in Suffolk. In the months to follow, organizers will take the sign on a regional tour to city and county locations across Hampton Roads.

Using welded materials to spell out the word LOVE, with a heart-shaped O, the see-through structure is brimming with recyclable beverage cans and plastic bottles. This winning design was selected following askHRgreen.org’s call for artists to develop a dynamic, traveling Virginia LOVE sign to complement its “Start Smart, Recycle Right” public awareness campaign.

“We loved Mr. Shirk’s idea for the sign to be created as a classroom welding project, and that students would design and construct it,” said Katie Cullipher, an askHRgreen.org team leader. “We were also drawn to their concept to create space within the artwork to contain recyclable materials.”

### **Putting it together**

The welding students began work on the LOVE sign in January. Its design and construction complemented state-mandated work standards for welding that included stick, Mig and Tig welding, as well as Oxy/fuel and Plasma cutting.

“The LOVE project for askHRgreen.org was an amazing opportunity for the students to apply the welding techniques they learned in the classroom,” said Shirk. “They operated with

such confidence in their abilities, and the students understood what the project was about—recycling bottles and cans.”

In addition, class members collected the recyclable items to fill the empty welded structure. That was music to the ears of Michael Benedetto, President and CEO of TFC Recycling.

“The students’ thoughtful approach to the design and execution of the LOVE sign reflects what our ‘Start Smart, Recycle Right’ message is all about,” said Benedetto. “The aim is to start smart by knowing which items are accepted for recycling in your community, and then to recycle right by making sure these items are empty, clean and dry before placing them out for recycling.”

As part of the LOVE sign project, askHRgreen.org and TFC Recycling provided the College & Career Academy at Pruden with a \$2,500 stipend to cover costs for materials, along with additional recyclable materials to complete the sculpture.

For details about the LOVE sculpture and schedule locations of its regional tour, visit <https://askhrgreen.org/recycling-is-for-lovers/>. The public is encouraged to post pictures of the LOVE sign to social media using hashtag #RecyclingIsForLovers.

**2023 LOVE Sign Schedule:**

April 22	Suffolk Earth & Arts Festival
May	Suffolk
June	Portsmouth
July	Newport News
August	Norfolk
September	Virginia Beach
October	Gloucester
November	James City County
December	York County

**About askHRgreen.org** [askHRgreen.org](https://askhrgreen.org) is your go-to resource for all things green in Hampton Roads – from recycling tips and pointers for keeping local waterways clean to water-saving ideas and simple steps to make local living easy on the environment. Launched in 2011, the region-wide public awareness and education campaign is administered through the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and powered by the following members: The cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton, Surry and York; the town of Smithfield; and HRSD. Like askHRgreen.org on

Facebook, follow on Twitter and Instagram, tune in to YouTube and catch the “Let’s Talk Green” blog, written by a team of local experts.

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