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## With tubs of dirt, a 16-year-old New Canaan student schemes to green the high school

By Brittany Lyte, Blyte@bcnnew.com  
Published: 01:06 a.m., Thursday, February 25, 2010

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This green roof caps the Mellon Institute building at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. It was installed by Green Roof Block, a Lake Saint Louis, Mo. company that installs the kind of aluminum planters Milunovich wants to install at New Canaan High School. Photo: Contributed Photo / New Canaan News

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In a classroom of burly builders in work boots, [Amanda Milunovich](#), 16, recorded notes on energy-efficient architecture in fuchsia ink.

While her peers rejoiced in a reprieve from school last week, Milunovich spent part of her February vacation in an eight-hour Certified Green Professional course learning about green building alongside a carpenter from Portland, Maine, and the owner of a Stamford-based construction company.

A green enthusiast and a junior at [New Canaan High School](#), Milunovich is the only student without a work belt that [Jim Sweeney](#), treasurer of the [Home Builders and Remodelers Association](#) of Fairfield County, recalls to ever enroll in a CGP class.

Milunovich says she's eco-savvy -- in simple ways, like eating local and ditching plastic water bottles for reusable ones, and in an I'm-not-green-just-because-it's-fashionable way, too. The newly licensed driver rejected a new car from her mother because driving her family's older auto isn't so bad and she didn't want to

be wasteful. Last year she founded the green roof club at New Canaan High School. And perhaps most impressive, Milunovich has launched this club into a no-nonsense campaign to convince the [New Canaan Public School](#) administration to install a green roof at the high school.

"We often don't think of children as having something to offer, and they do," said [Tony Calistro](#), director of education at Ring's [End Lumber Company](#), which sponsored the CGP course. "I'm very impressed with that girl. She's the first young person to express a specific interest and she's got a drive and the smarts to do it."

Her high school administrators are impressed, too. But while Milunovich said Principal [Tony Pavia](#) is supportive of greening the school with a roof of dirt and grass, stacked against its realization are concerns about money, maintenance and liability.

"As a student, I don't know if they think I have enough experience to know what I'm talking about -- and they don't know either," Milunovich said. "I think they need more concrete facts and that's why [I took] the course."

A green roof is a roof that is covered in vegetation. Also called living roofs, they are usually

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created with a combination of sod, soil, grass or plants. Some living roofs are gardens or lawns that must be mowed; others, like the type Milunovich wants to implement at the high school, are created more simply by layering portable planters filled with soil, grass and plants on top of the existing roof membrane.

"The green roof is a great way to bring the natural world into the high school and help the environment," Milunovich said. "It's also a science education project for students to study the effects of it. It looks good and it projects a good image of the high school as an innovative, environmentally friendly school."

A green roof at the high school could reduce storm runoff and naturally insulate the building by keeping it cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter, which could help decrease energy bills.

Green roofs are also known to help curb urban heat island effect.

"Cities and towns are getting hotter because of all the black roofs, but if you have a green roof with plants on top of the school, then the roof isn't going to get any hotter," Milunovich explained. "It's going to stay cool and it's also going to increase the lifespan of the roof membrane by 30 to 40 years because it won't be exposed directly to the elements and the plants will shield it from UV rays."

Yet another benefit is a green roof's ability to absorb carbon dioxide and increase oxygen levels in the air.

"It's actually really conducive to building a better learning environment," Milunovich said. "It will help kids learn better by giving them better air quality."

She added, "The great thing about these is that it wouldn't be a lot of maintenance. Some people have gardens and grow vegetables on their roof, but that's not what I'm trying to do because I understand that the school might not be able to keep up with that kind of maintenance. These plants would be native to the area and would just need rainfall, so it would be a really easy way to help green the high school."

The dirt and vegetation-filled aluminum blocks Milunovich is researching measure four square feet and four inches deep. They cost approximately \$50 each.

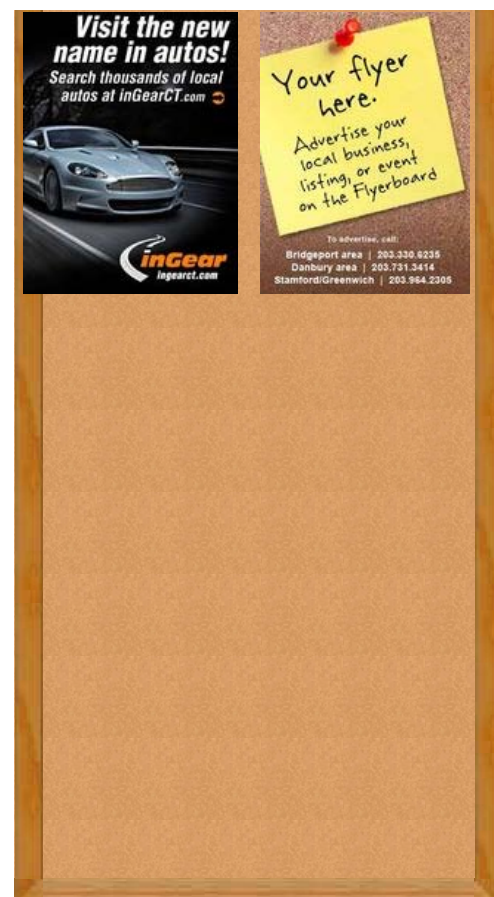
"When you put all the blocks together, it will look like a green roof," she said. "I'm even proposing that we start with 100 square feet. I know that isn't much, but it's easier to start small and build up once everyone sees the benefits."

This scaled-down starter roof will cost approximately \$2,000 to implement with zero maintenance fees, Milunovich said.

Greenwich Academy installed a garden roof on a library-classroom building on the campus in 2002. The 17,500 square-foot bed of top soil, grass and plantings is much more involved than the living roof Milunovich is advocating, but it's a progressive school feature that has helped [Greenwich Academy](#) earn national recognition as an environmentally astute institution.

According to [greenroofs.com](#), an online green roof project database, Greenwich Academy is the only educational institution in Connecticut with a living roof. The database, which does not claim to be comprehensive, sites a residence as the only building in New Canaan with a living roof.

"As one of the best public schools in Connecticut in a wealthy community, [New Canaan High School also needs] to take the lead in being environmentally -friendly. It's important that kids



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in my generation get involved because we're going to be living with this environment and this earth that we shape today ... ." she said. "You can always go greener, but I'm hoping to start by taking one little step and making one little change."



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