

Fifth graders jump into annual Water Festival

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EAST ALTON – Nearly 500 fifth graders participated in the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center's 15th Annual Water Festival at Lewis and Clark Community College Sept. 29.

The Water Festival gave students the opportunity to experience a number of interactive activity stations focused on freshwater topics.

“My favorite station was finding the macroinvertebrates in the pond water,” said North Elementary student Adie Redman. “I liked it the best because we found a lot of insects that I have never seen before.”

Besides collecting aquatic insects, fishing and canoeing, students also enjoyed learning about the Lewis and Clark Expedition, water pollution, predator/prey relationships, geographic information systems (GIS) and more.

“We had 25 different government agencies and local organizations participate in the Festival, either by leading an activity for the students that focused on a specific water topic, sponsoring the event, or both,” said Water Festival Coordinator and Environmental Educator Allison Rhanor. “This is in addition to the nearly 100 volunteers that got involved, as well and many departments here on campus. I’m so glad I get to be a small part of it.”

For the fourth year, students were asked to participate in a charitable drive for the Shoeman Water Projects, an organization whose main mission is to bring safe, clean water into communities in developing countries who only have access to unsafe water or in many cases they are walking up to four miles a day to collect that same unsafe water.

“The education component has always been there, but incorporating the shoe drive now adds a stewardship component as well, so the partnership is a great fit,” Rhanor said. “Showing these kids how they can make a real difference, even at their age, is a very powerful thing.”

This year’s drive brought in 803 pairs of shoes for the cause, and Margie Chilovich’s class from Sorento Elementary School was recognized for collecting the most shoes per student - 10.33.



“It was wonderful to see the students' excitement when they were announced as the class to collect the most shoes per person,” Chilovich said. “It was a good lesson for them to realize that small groups can achieve great things.”

Shoeman Water Projects funds its water projects and operations by collecting gently used or new shoes and selling them to generate revenue for the projects. These efforts also help keep usable shoes out of local landfills which, in-turn, helps keep water sources healthy.

“The shoe drive was important because it helps hundreds of lives, and more people can enjoy clean water,” said Sorento Elementary student Aubrey Wall.

Shoeman Water Projects Executive Director Yolanda DePrater facilitated a station on water conservation and fresh water resources during the event.

“I think it is extremely important to expand fifth graders' minds to understand the potential impact their behaviors may have on the rest of the world and to appreciate what we may take for granted here in America,” DePrater said. “In most cases our children have only experienced readily available water, and it is natural for them to take

that for granted. Over and over as we discussed it, I saw their surprise when I talked to them about children having to stay out of school and spend their days walking up to four miles to collect water for their families. It was hard for them to comprehend.”

Teachers from participating classes took part in an educational workshop Monday, Sept. 25, in preparation for the event.

“This year's workshop focused on the Project Wet Curriculum,” said North Elementary School Teacher Jason Chapman. “This workshop provided teachers with useful hands-on lessons that we can take back to the classroom to extend what the students learned at the Water Festival.”

Water Festival largest sponsor is Illinois American Water. The Great Rivers Land Trust also helped make this year’s event possible by donating a dock.

Visit www.ngrrec.org/Education/Children/Water-Festival/ to learn more.