



Local Student Utilizes SIUE STEM Center, Shines In Virtual Science Events

by Megan Wieser
June 2 2020 10:46 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – Having just finished his eighth-grade year at Liberty Middle School in Edwardsville, Will Wojcieszak used his love for science, especially fossils, to make the most of his at-home learning time amid COVID-19 by participating in virtual

STEM-related opportunities. Wojcieszak is an avid user of the resources and expertise of the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach. This March, he participated in the virtual Science and Engineering Research Challenge (SERC) hosted by the SIUE STEM Center.

Wojcieszak enjoyed a successful showing with his project “Can Climate Change Impact Fossil Collection Sites?” He placed third overall in the junior division and first in the Earth Science division, earning the NASA Earth Science Award with a nomination for Broadcom Master, a national science fair. With his award receipt, Wojcieszak had the opportunity to participate in a NASA webinar in April, where he heard from two NASA scientists and learned about careers at NASA and in science.

“Each regional science fair at SIUE has been a learning experience for Will,” explained Wojcieszak’s dad, Doug, of Will’s three years of SERC participation. “STEM personnel and volunteers give terrific feedback to all the kids who are selected to participate. Will is interested in geology and engineering. He excels at math and has a talent for building and fixing things.”

For his project, Wojcieszak researched how fossil collection data from a prominent site in Cincinnati changed from 2016-2020, and how those changes correlated with increased rainfall and erosion from climate change.

“Will simply loves collecting fossils,” Doug said. “He can spend an entire afternoon wandering through a creek bed or digging on a hillside in his adopted hometown of Cincinnati. He often brings home buckets of fossils. Will has a knack for identifying fossils and enjoys showing them to other people.”

SIUE STEM Center personnel have strongly encouraged Will to continue studying fossils and geology, according to Doug.

“We’re always impressed by the projects that students in our region bring to SERC,” said SIUE STEM Center Instructor and Outreach Specialist Colin Wilson. “Will, in particular, has shown a lot of initiative and enthusiasm. I’m glad to see those qualities continue to be rewarded, and that Will could talk with some like-minded scientists through these virtual opportunities.”

“As a parent, I appreciate all the resources of the SIUE STEM Center,” Doug emphasized. “From the regional science fair to summer camps and more, the STEM Center provides a wealth of experiences to encourage kids to explore science and the world around them. STEM personnel are extremely accessible and always happy to go

the extra mile for grade school students and their families. They are patient and kind with the kids and their parents. I encourage Metro East families to learn about the various services of the SIUE STEM Center.”

For more information on the SIUE STEM Center, visit SIUESTEMCenter.org.

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach comprises an independent group of researchers and educators, innovating ways to engage students and the public in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Within the SIUE Graduate School, the Center brings together research faculty, graduate students and practitioners to conduct education research. The Center contributes educational expertise to SIUE undergraduate classes and provides professional development for K-12 teachers. The Center boasts a significant library of equipment and resources, which are available for loan at no cost to campus and regional instructors. For more information, visit <https://www.siu.edu/stem/> or contact STEM Center Director Sharon Locke at (618) 650-3065 or stemcenter@siue.edu.

Will Wojcieszak, of Edwardsville, poses with a portion of his large fossil collection.