



Students dive into environmental sciences and fun at L&C Water Festival

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GODFREY – Approximately 453 fifth grade students in 19 classes from eight different schools gathered at Lewis and Clark Community College for the 13th annual Water Festival Friday, Sept. 18.

Despite morning rain showers, the students explored environmental sciences and outdoor activities during the daylong event, which was organized by the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC?).

“We had a storm roll through right as the classes started arriving, so we had a bit of a slow start,” said NGRREC Environmental Educator and Water Festival Coordinator Allison Rhanor. “It didn’t take too long for it to pass, though, and, once it did, we were able to get the classes through registration and back into rotation fairly quickly thanks to some great volunteers.”

As a part of the event, each class that participated was asked to collect shoes to donate to the Shoeman Water Project, which focuses on providing clean water to communities

in developing countries. A total of 1,015 pairs of shoes were collected during the shoe drive – enough shoes to purchase a water purification system for a community that struggles to find clean drinking water.

Terri Taake's fifth grade class from Illini Middle School in Jerseyville collected the most shoes, 271 pairs in all. That averages out to approximately 10 pairs of shoes per student in the class. Each student in the winning class received a Water Festival T-shirt for their efforts.

"Water Festival is pretty awesome," said Donny Smelcer, a fifth grader from Illini Middle School. "We get to see the fish, run around, learn stuff and have fun, too."

Other activities at Water Festival included canoeing, fishing, Japanese fish painting, bug collecting and geocaching. Students also learned about water collection in developing countries, water treatment methods, pollution causes and effects, storm water management, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, native fish species, bird migration, watershed management and water conservation.

"It's always so encouraging to see the excitement in these kids as they learn about their local freshwater resources," Rhanor said. "It's a privilege to be able to provide this kind of enrichment to our youth."

Teresa Cranmer, president and founder of the Mustard Seed Peace Project (MSPP), brought a MSPP Translator Ruben Gomez, who was born in the Guatemalan highland village of Chichicastenango, to talk to the students about the poor water quality in his native country. Gomez serves as a translator and guide for MSPP members when they are in Guatemala supplying much-needed water filters to people in rural areas. This was his second visit to the Water Festival at L&C.

"You are incredibly lucky to be born in this nation, to have what you have," Gomez said to the children. "You don't know how blessed you are to have clean water and food. I try to make the world conscious of how important water is, not only for me, not only for Guatemala, but for the entire world. You would be surprised how many people in Guatemala have to walk miles to get a bucket of water. Every little drop of Guatemalan water has to be boiled, and there are lots of health problems from drinking dirty water."

Cranmer and Gomez had girls collect water in jugs from the pond, while boys collected firewood to boil the water. This exercise helped illustrate the struggle Guatemalans face when obtaining clean water.

"I'd like to thank all of the local organizations and state and federal agencies that come together to run activity stations at our annual Water Festival," Rhanor said. "I'd also like

to thank all our volunteers and sponsors, who make this event possible. I'd especially like to thank Illinois American Water, which not only sponsors Water Festival each year, but also runs two activity stations as well as provides a water truck for students to fill their water bottles with throughout the day."

Others sponsors included Southern Regional Groundwater Protection Planning Committee, Madison County, Veolia Water, Wood River Refinery, the Horinko Group, Pepsi, Walmart, Casey's General Store, Dynegy and the St. Louis Bread Company.