

Students say YES to science Exploration

By Greg Lucid

The Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies hosted its second Young Environmental Scientists' (YES) conference at its Millbrook headquarters on Thursday, April 23. Students in grades 4-11, from schools across Dutchess County, presented ecological projects that evening to professional scientists.

Cary Institute scientists gave students constructive feedback about their science fair projects, creating a community that focuses less on competition and more on an exchange of ideas. Participants also had the opportunity to tour Cary's labs and listen to a lecture given by Dr. Sylvia Earle, a specialist in the field of oceanography.

Earle, an explorer-in-residence at the National Geographic Society and founder of both the Sustainable Seas Project and the Deep Search Foundation, told more than 100 guests and students earlier that day "consider your carbon footprint and what you can do ... everybody can do something."

A total of 16 student-presenters came from Alden Place Elementary School, G.W. Krieger Elementary School, Hagan Elementary School, Kinry Road Elementary School, Millbrook Middle School, Haviland Middle School, Van Wyck Junior High School, Saint Denis/Saint Columba School and Ossining High School. Some students grouped up to complete experiments while others worked alone.

Some presenters also made up the 230 students, ranging from grades 5-12 and representing 36 schools, who participated in the 50th Annual Dutchess County Regional Science Fair, held at Dutchess Community College earlier this month.

"The institute is being much more active in reaching out into the community," said Dr. Alan R. Berkowitz, Cary Institute head of education. "There's a lot of interest in alternative energy, the whole

way they're [students] thinking about global warming." He noted events like the conference and fair will hopefully encourage students to continue pursuing scientific studies. In addition to the conference, Berkowitz said Cary hosts an ecology camp each summer.

An environmental concern among many is the thought of transpiration and the threat of its harmful emissions. Thinking outside the box, or traditional car, is something one student looked at.

Alden Place Elementary School fourth-grader Miranda Schnoor, presented her study titled "Fossil Fuel Free Cars? Solar Or Supercapacitor Solutions."

Schnoor, who started her project in January, decided to find eco-friendly cars she could race against each other.

She designed a small supercapacitor model car using a battery to run it. The other car she made was a solar-powered car, which converts light into energy.

"I knew these both would probably be useful later," Schnoor said. Racing both cars against each other on a 10-foot track on her kitchen floor, her experiment results varied.

Using a lamp in place of sunlight, she tested the solar-powered car first.

She concluded her hypothesis was correct - that the supercapacitor car did run more swiftly than the solar-powered car because the capacitor is able to give off more energy than the solar-powered car could.

Talking with her dad about the results, she said it was determined a more useful car could possibly be made by combining a solar-powered car with a supercapacitor car. She hopes to conduct that experiment this summer.

Fifth-grade students Christian Pagan, Jonathan Enciso, Devin Tully and Julian Shaw from G.W.



Dr. Earle greeting students post-lecture and signing autographs. Photo submitted.

Krieger Elementary School in Poughkeepsie studied the causes of turbidity. Turbidity is defined as muddiness developed by stirring up sediment or having foreign particles suspended. Over several months, the students collected data from the Hudson River and Fall Kill Creek. They determined erosion is turbidity's main cause.

The YES Objective

Cornelia Harris, an education program leader at the Cary Institute, commented in a press release, "Our goal is to help participants feel proud of their work, and excited to explain and discuss what they've learned with scientists and their peers. Ultimately, we want to encourage these young learners to continue investigating the world

around them."

The YES Conference was created to foster a community of learning among science fair participants who are interested in understanding the natural world. The event will be held again next year.

The Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies is a private, not-for-profit environmental research and education organization. For more than 25 years, Cary Institute scientists have been studying the complex interactions that make up the natural world. Their objective findings lead to more effective policy decisions and increased environmental literacy. Areas of study include air and water pollution, climate change, invasive species and the ecological dimensions of infectious disease.

For more information, call (845)



In recognition of National Volunteer Week
The Dutchess County Chapter Red Cross thanks the volunteers for 100 years of dedicated service.

Interested in becoming a volunteer?
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Christine.stetler@arc-dc.org