

Wading into a science classroom

Students are getting out of the classroom and into local creeks to study the local watershed.

By AMANDA CREGAN
STAFF WRITER

Just a 10-minute hike up a trail that is tucked into a wooded Durham hillside, along a creek, lies the perfect classroom. Through Palisades Middle School's Watershed Integration Program, seventh-graders are studying science by experiencing it outside of the lab. In its second year, the program combines science, language arts and social studies into one-year course. Last Thursday afternoon, 40 middle school students slipped on their rubber boots or hip-high fishermen's waders and trekked up the rocky trail. They carried clipboards and buckets to collect samples along a pristine tributary of Cooks Creek. "It's really fun. It's not like an everyday thing. You get to go outside," said Sarah Johnson, 12. Katie French was filling a bag with

Palisades

muddy creek water. "It's way better than normal school cause you actually get to experience the real stuff," said the 13-year-old. Beth King was helping her science partner pull their "leaf packs" from the creek, where the students will sift through a collection of old, water-logged leaves to see how many and what type of macroinvertebrates (organisms without backbones that are larger than half a millimeter) are living there. "It's really fun. All the other kids are jealous," said King, 13, of the middle-schoolers who are not part of the watershed program. Spending a warm, spring afternoon wading in a creek looking for bugs is fun, but these kids also take on the project like professional field scientists. This year, the students have been out and around rural Upper Bucks communities more than a dozen times, collecting samples along Tinicum Creek, Haycock Run and Cooks Creek. The seventh-graders are analyzing the local streams for signs of pollution by study-

ing the creatures that inhabit them. "They can help us to tell the health of the stream," said Amanda Nickles, 13. "It could affect the ecosystem. If the macros start to die then the creatures that eat them start to die, and, eventually, it will affect us." The course begins after lunch period and runs through the end of the school day. In addition to science, the students study the history of the region, read nature-based novels and poetry, write journal responses reflecting on their field work and learn about how government and laws can protect the environment. "They really love the hands-on activities," said Dennis Gluck, one of the program's instructors. "They're really excited about getting out of the classroom, and I think they enjoy it. They make connections in the field with community and nature, and they socialize well with each other." The course is modeled after a watershed program started at Radnor Middle School in Delaware County.

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Montco commissioners change meeting days

By MARGARET GIBBONS
STAFF WRITER

Montgomery County commissioners are switching their biweekly meetings from Thursdays to Wednesdays. The switch was made to accommodate Commissioner Joseph M. Hoeffel III, who next month will begin a one-year stint as chairman of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. That agency meets one Thursday a month and those meetings sometimes conflict with county commissioner meetings. Commissioner Chairman James R. Matthews said it was less confusing if the commissioners changed their meeting day rather than change the day when there is a conflict between the two meetings. The first Wednesday meeting is slated for June 9. The agenda meetings, which are open to the public, will be held on the Tuesdays prior to the Wednesday meetings.

Commissioner Chairman James R. Matthews, citing citizen disinterest, said he did not believe the events would be well attended. However, he said he was willing to listen to what the staff proposed. The county this year has an operating budget of \$407.7 million that is funded, in part, by a 2.695 mill real estate tax. The last time the county increase its real estate tax was in 2005 when it went up 0.05 mill from 2.84 mills to 2.89 mills for open space funding approved by county voters. Taxes were decreased to 2.84 mills in the 2007 budget and dropped again to 2.695 mills in 2008.

County deputies honored

Commissioners recently honored two sheriff deputies for their professionalism. The commissioners presented Deputy Harry Burke and Deputy Sgt. Joe Gertenitch with resolutions commending them for their recognition of, and immediate response to, a medical emergency. Burke, an EMT, recognized that a county employee was having a stroke and needed emergency treatment. Gertenitch quickly drove the employee to a nearby hospital. "They were just doing their jobs," said Acting Sheriff Al Ricci.

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Trying to cut the red tape for veterans

A conference to help military families take advantage of services and benefits available through a multitude of groups will be held in Doylestown on June 15.

By PETER HALL
STAFF WRITER

There is no shortage of services available to military service veterans. They range from discounts at area restaurants to crisis counseling services for soldiers coping with the ravages of post traumatic stress disorder. But navigating the federal, state and local government agencies, nonprofit groups and businesses that provide those services can be daunting, especially for veterans under the stress of returning to civilian life. Janet Manion wanted to give veterans and their families a way to find the services they needed quickly and easily. Manion founded the Travis Manion Foundation in memory of her son, a Marine Corps officer killed in action April 29, 2007, in Iraq. "There was no one-stop shop, so we hoped to bring this all under one umbrella," Manion

said. Last year she approached Bucks County commissioners for assistance and took the first steps toward forming the Military Community Network of Bucks County. The network, a partnership of the commissioners and the Travis Manion Foundation, currently lists a multitude of services and benefits available to veterans on its website. Stacey Hajdak, director of communications for Bucks County, said the goal is for the organization to become a nexus for veterans service providers to refer veterans who have multiple issues to other agencies that can help. "We want a network that embraces our entire military service community and that encompasses service members, veterans and their families," Hajdak said. To that end, Hajdak said, the Military Community Network is holding a conference 9 a.m. to noon June 15 at Delaware Valley College in Doylestown Township. Hajdak, an Army veteran who served a one-year tour in Iraq, said she has worked closely with a number of veterans service organizations and conducted focus groups to understand the issues veterans are facing and

FOR MORE INFO

Register for the Military Community Network conference at militarycommunitynetwork.org/conference

identify those services most in demand. For example, Hajdak said, counseling services are available to help veterans deal with stress and psychological issues that often attend the return to civilian life. The counselors may find the source of a veteran's stress is difficulty finding housing or work or the prospect of paying for a child's college education. The Military Community Network can help counselors and veterans find housing or career assistance or financial aid for the children of veterans, she said. "It's just much nicer when they know each other. They can say 'I can refer you to so and so

at XYZ agency,'" Hajdak said. Manion said the foundation has invited representatives of local chambers of commerce, the Veterans Administration, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other veterans' service organizations, but the conference is open to anyone who works with veterans. There is no cost to attend the conference and a continental breakfast will be served. The conference is funded by the Travis Manion Foundation and Delaware Valley College has donated the use of its facilities. Peter Hall can be reached at 215-345-3067 or phall@phillyburbs.com.

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