

Summer 2010 News

Two WNY Teachers participated in the third annual Honeywell Institute for Ecosystems Education

Ms. Marie Romano and Ms. Debbie Lena participated in the third annual Honeywell Institute for Ecosystems Education. It is a one-week summer institute that combines classroom instruction with diverse outdoor experiences at sites throughout the Hackensack watershed.



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Teachers from Hudson, Bergen trudge through watershed, gaining hands-on experience in science

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By JEAN-PIERRE MESTANZA

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Walking in mud and catching frogs in the Hackensack River Watershed were two of the hands-on lessons teachers experienced last week during a workshop to improve teaching science to middle and high schoolers.

The Honeywell Institute for Ecosystems Education wrapped up Friday afternoon at the Secaucus Library.

In its third year, the workshop averages about 28 teachers from Hudson and Bergen counties annually, and takes teachers into the watershed to give them a firsthand look at nature and to impart teaching techniques they can take back to the classroom, according to Dale Rosselet, vice-president of education at the New Jersey Audubon Society.

"These activities get you excited about the material and concepts," Debbie Lena, 38, a teacher at West New York Middle School said. "When you get excited, it is easy to get the kids excited."

Bhaskar Singh, 57, a teacher at the Better Choices Program in Jersey City, said he "learned how you can use the resources in the community to supplement what is being taught in the classroom."

The camp's goal is for students to "drive their own learning rather than the teacher telling you information from a book," Rosselet said.

Marie Romano, 63, a general science teacher at School 1 in West New York, treasured what she learned and said she planned to "bring it to the classroom."

According to Brian Vermachio, a facilitator at the workshop and a Toms River High School science teacher, a follow-up session will be held in June of next year so teachers can "take the next step in inquiry-based learning."

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Eco-friendly summer school

Hudson County teachers take part in science institute

by Lana Rose Diaz

Reporter staff writer

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While students count down their final days of summer, a few teachers from Hudson County joined each other in a summer school of their own last week.

They had their bags filled with pens and paper at the ready, but instead of working in a classroom, they took their packs and headed to the great outdoors.



Marie Romano (Public School No. 1, West New York), Debra Lena (Public School No. 6, West New York), Bhaskar Singh (Zero Tolerance Program, Jersey City), and Raza Qamar (Hudson County Community School, Jersey City) participated in the third annual Honeywell Institute for Ecosystems Education, a one-week summer institute that combines classroom instruction with diverse outdoor experiences at sites throughout the Hackensack watershed.



It's a program that's important for the teachers and will also be helpful for their students in the fall because, as Romano said, "You can't learn science from a book."

**"If I'm excited, the kids will also be excited." –
Bhaksar Singh**



During the program, teachers explored forested and field habitats, took an eco-cruise on the Hackensack River, and investigated the freshwater streams

and tidal salt marshes with environmental educators and naturalists.

The experience is meant to help teachers transform textbook curricula into new and inspiring lesson plans with a “hands-on” approach to learning.

Bringing the outdoors to the kids

“It is very, very helpful for the students,” said Qamar, who was attending the program for the second time. “We can bring these experiments to the classroom.”

Qamar said that the program was very well organized and its leaders are very well-informed, which made participating a pleasure.

All of the teachers agreed that for Hudson County students who are growing up in urban areas, figuring out ways to bring the outdoors to them is an important component of learning about the world.

“Everything now is geared toward environmental issues,” said Romano. “This is a great way to show them what ‘green’ can be like.”

Romano said she changes her lesson plans every year, not just for the kids, but so that she also learns something new.

Romano added that coming to programs like the Honeywell Institute excites her for the year ahead. The others agreed.

“[Students] lose interest because it’s too much book work,” said Singh. “If I’m excited, the kids will also be excited.”

Lena said the program was giving her new ideas about how to bring real world experience to the kids back in West New York.

She and Romano are already planning a field trip to the Meadowlands for the upcoming school year.

Investing in the future

The 18 participating teachers received free tuition for the summer institute, classroom resource materials, a monetary stipend for program completion, and 30 hours of professional development credit.

Honeywell, a private technology company, created the program in conjunction with New Jersey Audubon, an environmental group, and both organizations admitted their own reasons for investing in New Jersey teachers.

“As one of the world’s leading technology companies, we’re committed to inspiring the next generation of scientists,” said Kelly Reed of Honeywell Hometown Solutions. “There’s a resource benefit down the road.”

Reed said that with 60 percent of their workforce still in the United States, Honeywell is committed to making sure science is taught in the United States in a “leading way” with “contemporary” and “robust” curriculum.

Dale Rosselet, NJA vice-president for education, said that the mission of NJA is to preserve habitat and species biodiversity in New Jersey.

“We’re trying to be very proactive in making sure teachers have the skills and experiences,” said Rosselet.

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