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- [Roslyn News](#)
- [Syosset-Jericho Tribune](#)
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ONLINE EDITION FRIDAY JULY 23, 2004

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- [Current Edition](#)
- [Calendar of Events](#)
- [Archive](#)

News	Sports	Opinion	Obituaries	Contents
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News

Win at NYS Competition Sends Farmingdale Team to Canon Envirothon

First Time a Long Island Team Upsets Upstate Entries

While Long Island is known for its coastal waters, beaches and suburban lawns, the region now fields a winning team of environmental experts who are kids. A five-member group of students from Farmingdale High School, recently placed first in the New York State Envirothon at its two-day championship competition held at Morrisville State College, Farmingdale beat out other groups representing 52 counties from around the state by accumulating the most points overall. The team, representing both Nassau County as the Long Island Regional winner at the state level, now moves on to the Canon Envirothon in July.

This was the 14th New York State Envirothon and the first time that a downstate group has outscored the upstate teams from more rural communities. The New York win sends the suburban Farmingdale team to the Canon North American Envirothon. This 17th annual gathering begins July 26 at Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, West Virginia and runs through August 1. It brings together over 250 students from the United States and Canada.

Each competition level [county, state and North American] tests teams on knowledge in five areas: soils/land use, forestry, aquatic ecology, wildlife and a current issue. This year's state topic was conservation management in urban areas. Though students may become experts in one area, they work as a team problem solving to answer test questions. In addition, the competition's thematic topic requires the five-student teams to solve the issue on-site and provide oral presentations to a panel of judges. The program is coordinated at the local and state level by the soil and water conservation districts of the respective counties.

Kudos are in order for the Farmingdale students and team members Carolyn Badalucco, Shawn Billerman, Christine Ellman, Yuri Hanada and Michelle Dubuke. Mostly eleventh graders, except for Yuri Hanada, who was recruited this year as a tenth grader, the Farmingdale group has won the Long Island Regional competition

for three years running now. However, in the state championship, it placed 22 in 2002 and 11 in 2003, before achieving a first place win this year in 2004. Science teachers Lorie Sheinwald and Patti Ziegler have been the team's advisors for the last three years.

"When I first came here [Farmingdale High School] three years ago, I had heard about the Envirothon," said science teacher Lorie Sheinwald and a team co-advisor, "and with the blessing of science department chair Steve Weiss, I recruited students for our first team. It has been exciting to meet and talk with other teachers and students from other districts."

"We learned a lot at each competition," said Shawn Billerman, who will be a senior this fall and is thinking about majoring in environmental studies or ornithology in college. "While we knew the materials and information, we learned how to depend on each other."

"It was our previous experience in the oral presentation that gave us the edge this year," said Michelle Dubuke. "We knew what we had to learn and we were coached by Sharon Frost and her co-workers at Suffolk County's Water and Soil Conservation District, which sponsors the Long Island Regional competition for Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

"Even though we huddle together to analyze the issue topic and make recommendations with very little presentation materials [so teams have no advantage over one another], the time we spend together is really fun - whether it's after school in preparation for the competition or when we're under pressure during the tournament," said Christine Ellman, who is working on a research project at the State University of New York at Stony Brook this summer. "The experience has been really rewarding."

Participation in the North American Canon Envirothon permits students to compete for a share of \$30,000 in scholarships. The competition encourages students to look at nature and increase their understanding of critical issues related to the environment. It has become North America's largest high school environmental educational competition involving more than 500,000 students. Made possible by generous contributions from Canon U.S.A. Inc. and organized by the National Association of Conservation Districts in the U.S. and The Canadian Forestry Associations, the Canon Envirothon combines classroom learning with hands-on field experience. Its mission is to develop knowledgeable and dedicated citizens who can make informed decisions about the environment.

Long Island Team Wins State Competition and Heads to Canon Envirothon/Page 2



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