



Old Bethpage Village Restoration Hosts 13th Annual Long Island Envirothon

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Chaminade High School Triumphs in Premiere LI Environmental Competition

Students who visit Old Bethpage Village Restoration are usually tasked with imagining what it was like to live in the past. However, during the 13th Annual Long Island Envirothon, held on the Restoration grounds on April 26, high school students from all over Nassau and Suffolk counties were given a very different, but equally valid task: to look at the present, and, more importantly, the future, from the viewpoint of environmental conservation.

In the Envirothon, teams of high school students compete in six categories: Aquatics, Current Issue (which changes from year to year), Forestry, Oral Presentation, Soils and Wildlife. Some of the high schools that participated this year were Bethpage, Chaminade, Farmingdale, Garden City and MacArthur High Schools.

While every station includes some general questions on the topic just to make sure students have done the required reading (the curriculum is provided online), some of the material is challenging to say the least.

“Truthfully, we’re giving them questions that Obama can’t answer right now,” said Donna Martini, a new member of the Nassau County Planning Commission who was one of the judges of the oral presentations. While presentation skills were graded, Martini explained that the students were primarily judged on their environmental knowledge and how well they approached the problem. This year’s oral presentation topic, shared by all teams, concerned an imaginary estuary facing flooding and saltwater intrusion.

The teams were given their topic in February, and had until the competition to research estuaries — in addition to all of the topics at other stations, of course. “They’re asked to learn an awful lot,” said Martini.

Furthermore, the test questions and tasks that the students must perform change between competitions. “It’s always a little different,” said Brian Zimmerman, district manager for Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District. Zimmerman was running the soils station, as he has for many years. “You have freshman coming that are here for three years or something — you have to change it so they don’t know the questions in advance.”

Zimmerman explained that he kept running the soil station because the kids seemed to learn so much from the event — furthermore, he believes they might now consider some career choices that otherwise would never have occurred to



Pictured, from left to right, are Kimberly Lotito, Bethpage; County Executive Edward Mangano; Brian Zimmerman, district manager for Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District; Kayla Mladinich, Bethpage; Sharon Frost, Soil District Technician for Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District; Colin Radcliffe, Bethpage; and Nassau County Legislator Joseph Belesi.

them. “I just like to push them to soil science, because we need more soil scientists!” said Zimmerman with a big grin.

Of course, Zimmerman was not the only one trying to spark an interest in his particular field. “We like to see who the future wildlife rehabilitators are going to be—the next young scientists,” said Dennis Fluery, education director at Wildlife Rescue Center of the Hamptons, who ran the wildlife station.

In addition to answering questions, students at the wildlife station took part in a hands-on activity where they had to identify bones and native animal remains. Also on display was an injured Eastern Screech Owl; the bird had been hit by a car, resulting in the loss of a wing, and had been rescued by the Wildlife Rescue Center.

Fluery said that while this was his first year running a station at the Envirothon, he thought it was a great idea. “I think it’s a good day off from the regular class day — they’re learning, and they’re out in the sun; there should be more days like this,” he said.

Sharon Frost from the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District, one of the main organizers, explained that the competition kept growing. When she first got involved with the competition 10 years ago, said Frost, there were six teams competing; this year, there were 38.

By the end of the competition, Chaminade High School had taken first place as they had the previous year, with the highest scores in the competition in both Aquatics and Oral Presentation. Division Avenue High School and Wantagh High School placed second and third in the county, respectively. Suffolk County schools Sachem High School North, Mount Sinai High School, and Huntington High School took the top three slots in their county, although Chaminade earned the highest score overall.

The location of the Envirothon alternates between Nassau and Suffolk Counties every year; next year, Suffolk County will host the event at the USDAN Center for the Creative and Performing Arts. Will Chaminade reign supreme three years in a row? Maybe, maybe not. Every high school in Nassau and Suffolk counties not already participating in the Envirothon is invited to send a team for next year’s competition.