



Submitted photo

A researcher aboard the research vessel *Lake Guardian* prepares the ships ponar for a grab below the surface of Lake Ontario as Cicero-North Syracuse High School teacher Kim Linkinhoker looks on. The ponar collects mud samples for biological studies of the lake's benthic animals, including worms, snails, crustaceans and midge fly larvae.

Floating classroom provides teachers new perspective on environmental science

By JANET REBEOR

jrebeor@palltimes.com

OSWEGO — Students in science classrooms locally and across the region will get a new perspective this fall about the fresh water that surrounds us as their teachers participated in a weeklong floating classroom on Lake Ontario last week.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency research vessel *Lake Guardian* was docked in Oswego on Thursday as the 15 teachers and educators aboard were led ashore for a day of exploring the sand dunes and the Salmon River fish hatchery.

Once back aboard, in a round-robin share on the open upper deck of the vessel, New York Sea Grant coastal education specialist Helen Domske introduced the teachers and the educators involved in the program, and each talked about what they had learned and were excited to share once he or she returned home.

Domske told the group that Illinois Indiana Sea Grant, along with other sea grants including New York State Sea Grant has created the Center for Great Lakes Literacy, and their voyage would not be possible without that cooperation.

The teachers, many from New York state and others from Illinois, Michigan and Indiana, had the opportunity to meet regularly during their time aboard to share what they were learning and would be taking back to their respective communities, schools and classrooms.

"This group has been delightful to work with," Domske said. "One of the things I've gotten is watching you share this curriculum circle."

Seated in a circle on the upper deck of the ship, each of the educators spoke about the take away from their experience, including local Fulton elementary school teacher Colleen Warner.

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"I have two things," Warner said. "One — even though my kids are 9 and 10 years old, they really care about their environment and they live next to a Great Lake and the Oswego River. So, like most of you, I'm hoping to pay back not just one side of the argument, but several facts so that the kids can really make good decisions and become thinkers about their environment and decisions they make."

The second take away was on a more personal note, as Warner added how much fun she had. "My favorite part was working on the ponar," she said. "When it started pouring rain, then sleeting and we were out there working in the mud and slush I thought, 'Wow I feel like a scientist out here!' I loved it."

The ponar is a piece of equipment aboard the ship that is lowered into the water to scoop samples of mud from the

bottom of the lakebed that can be raised to the surface for analysis.

During the sharing session, each teacher expressed a different aspect of the weeklong adventure that meant the most to each participant. While some talked about a new confidence to elicit better quality interest from students about science and scientific methods, one teacher talked about emulating the experiments using available, recycled products available to her students. Still others talked about teaching students the effects of their own actions on the environment, and what the environment could mean to students as lifelong learners.

"It will be a great way to get them thinking about careers in environmental science," Lisa Wischerath, of the Holley Central School District, said.

Wischerath noted that sharing her methods and working within the diverse group aboard *Lake Guardian* has provided a greater ability for her to teach her

own students. "Just hearing what other environmental science teachers are doing in their class is really inspiring me to try some new things in mine as well," she said.

Scott Krebbeks, a Honeoye Falls-Lima middle school science teacher, said that trying to sum up the trip in one statement was difficult. "The one common thing that's really been impressed upon me is the people at each one of the places we've visited who have really dedicated their lives to monitoring the environment, monitoring water quality, studying these ecosystems," he said. "It's my hope that I can take from this some things back to my classroom that will really get the kids interested and hopefully let them see that they can maybe choose a career in the environmental sciences."

For more information about the trip, visit the voyage blog at www.seagrant.sunysb.edu/blog.

The Palladium-Times

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Monday, July 15, 2013

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"This group has been delightful to work with," Domske said. "One of the things I've gotten is watching you share this curriculum circle." Seated in a circle on the upper deck of the ship, each of the educators spoke about the take away from their experience, including local Fulton elementary school teacher Colleen Warner.

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Photo by Janet Rebeor