

Young scientists perform outdoor research in Mittineague Park

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"I like wildlife and this program because I'm going to become a veterinarian," said Tim Hourihan, as he squatted to examine the poison glands behind the eyes on the American toad.

Tim and his classmates enjoyed an hour and a half of instruction by naturalist Nancy Congdon and Kevin Kopchynski prior to entering into the field for four hours on Thursday, June 16. Once in the park, the amateur naturalists, bursting with unspoiled nine-year-old curiosity, used long dip nets to capture various pond organisms.

Then, with Ms. Congdon's guidance, they separated the tadpoles from the water boatmen and other creatures and deposited them into plastic containers filled with water. It didn't take long for Ethan Kimiegh to deliver a water beetle and Madeline Mann to help capture "a humungous frog." Later in the morning, the students also studied meadow habitat, and collected insects in petri dishes.

"I love this day," said Dominic Santaniello. "It's a chance for searching and finding different insects."

For two volunteer parents, Jamie Brooks and John Gallant, the day was about more than finding insects.

Watching their own third-grade chil-

dren revel in the beauty of the park, both were reminded of their own youthful adventures playing for hours at Mittineague Park.

The enthusiasm of Dominic, Tim, and the volunteer parents was echoed by classroom teacher, Phyllis Zuccolo.

"This program is a perfect opportunity for our students," she said. "It connects exactly with our Common Core curriculum, which this year focuses on ecosystems and how creatures adapt and survive.

"This is what scientists do," Ms. Zuccolo added. "This is real research."

Kristin Morezio, another Grade 3 teacher, appreciated how well-organized the program is.

"Kids can really make connections with such a hands-on experience," she said.

Once the insects were collected and sorted, students had a chance to document their findings in their journals. That required sketching the organism from careful observation. Naturalist Congdon urged the scientists not to draw the beetle from memory but from slow watching.

"Let the organism show you where his eyes are or how long his tail is," she said.

After the researchers had sketched and reviewed their findings together, it

was time to wistfully return the insects to their homes.

"I learned that water striders really do walk on water," Ava Hermans summarized.

However, her nine-year-old confidence was a bit less sure when Ms. Congdon reminded her, "Scoop up that

tadpole. Get you fingers around it, return it to the pond."

(Anyone interested in keeping the Student Environmental Education program going with a contribution can send a tax-deductible donation to The West Springfield Environmental Committee, PO Box 388, West Springfield, MA 01090)

Fourth of July parade to honor state baseball champions

Live music, barbeque to follow on town common

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on Kings Highway, and then right on Elm Street before traveling to the town common on Park Street. Cheer on the Terriers' baseball team and coaches as they travel in a parade bus courtesy of Peter Pan Bus Lines. The Mayor's Office, School Department, and several town departments worked together to coordinate the parade and other events.

Following the parade, a celebration on the common will include brief remarks at 11 a.m., and live music presented by Farmington Bank (American Classic and Simply Swing bands).

The UNICO Chicken BBQ will be

serving from 11:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. Anyone wishing to attend the barbecue should purchase tickets in advance (\$11 per person) at the Park & Recreation Office, 26 Central St. (weekdays, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.).

The Terriers will continue their victory tour with a visit to Fenway Park on July 6 to watch the Boston Red Sox take on the Texas Rangers, Mayor Will Reichelt told the School Committee Tuesday.

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