

Green learning in bloom

BCC expands student environmental summit

By Jenn Smith
Berkshire Eagle Staff

PITTSFIELD — Environmental science can be slick, sticky, smelly and squirmy.

Some Berkshire County students learned that Wednesday at the annual Youth Environmental Summit.



Jared Fanning, 14, of Lee Middle and High School, makes soap from used cooking oil at Berkshire Community College during the Berkshire Youth Environmental Summit on Wednesday. *Ben Garver / Berkshire Eagle Staff*

"Ick," said one girl.

"Eww," said a boy.

"It tickles," a girl squealed.

A group of elementary school students sifted through a "vermicomposting" bin — one that composts soil with the help from red wiggler worms. A boy held a handful of the writhing creatures up to the face of a reporter. "Look," said Luke Maynard, a fourth-grader at Egremont Elementary School, "if you look really close, you can see what they're digesting."

The worms have been feeding on various fruit peels since the beginning of the semester. That's when a new composting initiative was started in the Grade 4 classrooms of the elementary school. "We were finding out that we were throwing away more food than we should," said Courtney Lovellette, an Egremont fourth-grader.

At the summit, Courtney and a group of her classmates shared their work with a group of students from Stearns Elementary School.

This year's summit, held at Berkshire Community College, drew about 265 students, mostly from local public, private, parochial and homebased elementary and middle schools.

Some high school students and school teachers, along with adults from several community environmental education organizations, helped to facilitate the day-long event.

The program is organized by the Berkshire Environmental Educators Network through Flying Cloud Institute.

Over the course of the school year, participating students worked closely with their

teachers and respective organizations and designed a hands- on, school- based environmental project, conducted research, made recommendations and evaluated the outcomes.

They shared their findings with other school students at the summit.

"All across Berkshire County, you, as students, have recycled, gardened and composted. You've had impressive results so far," said Gary Levante, program coordinator of the Berkshire Bank Foundation, which co- funded the event.

Other presentations and workshops of the day included green architecture, soap- making with used cooking oil, wind energy, animal studies, healthy cooking, creating a community action plan and more.

Katherine Millonzi, the sustainable food program manager for Williams College, also spoke at the event.

Additional youth- powered activities happening in the area include farming, natural art and organic school gardening programs. Members of the Dalton Braves youth soccer team have made fliers to pass out to other teams, encouraging them to reduce waste by using reusable water bottles.

Said St. Agnes School sixthgrader Hannah Rueger: " I think these are good ideas because I want my future children to live on a safe and healthy planet."

To reach Jenn Smith: jsmith@berkshireeagle.com, or (413) 496-6239.