

Hands-on learning experience

YES to saving the planet

By Jenn Smith

Berkshire Eagle Staff

PITTSFIELD

The presenters came in bearing everything from high-tech gadgets to gardening tools for the annual YES: Youth Environmental Summit.

Nearly 500 students in grades 4 through 12 from 15 public and private Berkshire County Schools participated in Wednesday's event held at Berkshire Community College.

The mission of the summit was to generate and share ideas regarding all aspects of the environment.

"The environment is the No. 1 thing to teach in schools because if we don't have that, we don't have anything.

This [summit] is a democracy of learning. It doesn't matter how old you are, you still have a say," said Jane Burke, whose organization Flying Cloud Institute is one of the event leaders.

The summit is organized by the Berkshire Environmental Educators Network (BEEN), a network of school teachers and environmental education providers, including Flying Cloud, The Center for EcoTechnology, STEM Pipeline, Massachusetts Audubon Society and Housatonic Valley Association. It is supported by multiple grants from area and state cultural councils and environmental groups.

The daylong event began in the Boland Auditorium of BCC's Koussevitzky Arts Center, with opening remarks from BCC President Paul Raverta; Julie Hannum, BCC's coordinator of the Secondary Postsecondary Career Vocational Technical Education Linkage Initiative; and state Rep. Paul Mark, D-Hancock, who sits on the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

Will Conklin, executive director of the Great Barrington-based Greenagers youth environmental group, gave a keynote address.

"Today you're building a community of learners and conscientious people, and that's stewardship for our environment," he said.

The remainder of the day was dedicated to students' research presentations, and participation in some of two dozen workshops offered, led by students and teachers as well as other

YES, continued on [A4](#)



Will Conklin of Greenagers speaks Wednesday at the Youth Environmental Summit held at BCC, describing how 'hands to work' can make an impact. The photograph behind him shows dirty hands after a day of work resurfacing the Housatonic River Walk.

Photos by Ben Garver / Berkshire Eagle Staff



Students listen to presentations by their peers during the summit.

Article Continued Below

[See YES on Page A04](#)

Ideas shared at YES

YES from A1

community- based environmental educators.

During the research presentations, six in total, fourth- and fifth-graders from Pittsfield's Silvio O. Conte Community School

reminded the audience to “look at the little things” during their presentation on locating and identifying mosses, while Monument Valley Regional Middle School seventh-graders shared the big picture of the benefits of making “responsible and sustainable food choices.”

As a presenter, Jodi Morawiec, a fourthgrader at Lee Elementary School, said she was both “excited and nervous” about running a workshop with fellow students on local clay identification and making clay.

“It’s also nice that we’re not working in school,” she said.

“Except we’re working on this here,” her classmate Olivia Sands said.

Other workshops ranged from the simple science of making reusable water bottles, as presented by Undermountain Elementary School in Sheffield to the more complex structure and process of wind-powered energy generators as shown by students of the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School.

Monument Valley seventh-graders Brocque Tonini and Madilyn Heller shared their work on a future city project they called “Zeliotopolis,” which stemmed from an interactive environmental engineering and architecture program for youths at their school.

Said Tonini, “I think it’s a good event to get new ideas from other people about things you never knew, and from people your own age. It makes it less boring too.”

2

