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Contact: Linda McCandless, llm3@cornell.edu, 607-254-5137

Teachers Go to Work at Cornell's Experiment Station

By Timothy P. Krakowiak

GENEVA, NY: Area teachers endured a week of work at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva last month so students in classrooms across the Finger Lakes can adjust their focus, with or without a microscope.

As part of the Summer Work Experience Program created by Karen Springmeier, executive director of the Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board (FLWIB), teachers from local elementary, middle and high schools were hosted in various departments at the Experiment Station to enhance their ability to motivate students about career opportunities in the region.

"We all have a commitment to creating an awareness in the educational community about career opportunities on the campus and career paths that our students can take," said Springmeier, adding that they chose the Experiment Station because of the diverse employment opportunities offered.

As a result of exceeding all federal performance standards, the FLWIB received \$186,000 in Performance Incentive funds under the Workforce Investment Act to dedicate to unique projects that enhance the area labor force. This program is one of nine.

During the first week of the program, 20 Finger Lakes educators spent time at various area businesses. The second week, facilitated by John Clow, director of the Leatherstocking Center for Economic Education at the State University of New York College in Oneonta, provided structured shadowing opportunities and planning sessions to prepare participants to integrate this experience into their lesson plans and curricula.

"We found that the program encourages interaction between the education and business community, introduces many teachers to the economic base of their community so that they can pass that knowledge on to their students, provides an understanding of what businesses are looking for in employees and develops a better understanding of why the business and education communities are dependent on one another," said Clow.

All three teachers assigned to the Station plan to work with NYSAES staff again in the future.

Pat Schwab, second grade teacher at Lincoln Primary School in Newark, worked with Angela Baldo and the Plant Genetic Resources Unit (PGRU) doing computational biology. She developed a module for her students about the different varieties of *Brassica* conserved at PGRU that she will implement next spring with seeds and plants from Baldo's collection. PGRU also donated two old computers to Lincoln Primary that will run the educational computer program Edubuntu.

Teresa Gable, a seventh grade science teacher at Seneca Falls Middle School, worked with Dan Fessenden and Kitty Noble at the Agricultural & Food Technology Park where she was introduced to the CherryPharm beverage packaging site and the Partnerships for Innovation Program. At NYSAES, she also met Betsy Bihn of horticultural sciences and learned about the National Good Agricultural Practices Program; Chris Smart of plant pathology and the Summer Science Camp; plant pathologists Bob Seem and Dave Gadoury; and toured horticulturist Courtney Weber's berry tissue lab.

"I learned that there are amazing people who are willing to help get students excited about learning science and offer resources to help. I plan on having some of the scientists share their world with my students," said Gable.

Bruce Baker, technology education teacher at Marcus Whitman High School, worked with Gemma Osborne and communications services, learning about the offset printing, photomicroscopy, web design, graphic arts, news writing and event management. He created a PowerPoint presentation to share with his peers.

"The Station is an exciting place with research, entrepreneurship, community outreach, volunteerism, summer work experience for students, committed people at every level, a great employer and so on," said Baker. "I can't say enough about the positive climate I felt on campus."

If funding is available, the program is expected to continue next year.

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