

Bringing lessons to life: Jeffersonville High School science class learns about ponds at Wathen Park



Jeffersonville High School juniors Alex Looney, left, and Sarah Bridges take depth measurements in Wathen Park for their advanced placement environmental science class. Staff photo by C.E. Branham



Abby Niemann uses a NOVA 5000 to compute oxygen and pH levels in the pond at Wathen Park. Staff photo by C.E. Branham

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By TARA HETTINGER

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JEFFERSONVILLE — In a green, moss-covered pond, 17-year-olds Sarah Bridges and Alex Looney slowly moved their paddles in the water, trying to navigate their inflatable boat to the center to measure the depth.

For Looney, this was his first time ever out exploring a pond.

“It was nasty and smelly, but I’d definitely do it again, because it was fun,” he said with a grin as he used a pick to get pond remains out of his thick hair.

However, their trip to Wathen Park, off Middle Road, on Wednesday morning wasn’t just for fun. It was for their advanced placement environmental science class at Jeffersonville High School.

“If you can get in there and do it, they’ll be able to relate to it on a test a lot better than if they haven’t done it,” said teacher Mark Reilly.

He said students in the class can take a test to get college credit, so he wants to make sure they understand topics, such as pH levels, various plant life and more, which they studied Wednesday.

“It helps me learn. It’s hands-on instead of just learning out of a textbook. It helps me remember better,” 17-year-old Summer Mathews said.

“I think it’s really cool and interesting,” 16-year-old Matthew Dilmaghani said. “I don’t have any classes like this. It’s a nice change of pace.”

Dilmaghani — so intrigued by an assignment to draw a basic map of the area — decided to take it one step further, identifying all the plant life that he could.

Reilly said he hopes projects like this help instill the love of science for more students. He said he can already see it happening.

“You can tell they’ll be biologists,” he exclaimed, as the two in the boat started analyzing what they were finding.

Bridges said she wants to become a zoologist.

“I like wildlife and I’m always the one to do stuff nobody else wants to do,” she said as to her reasoning behind getting in the boat. “It’s a lot funner than sitting at the desk and looking at the board. You’ll remember it, because it’s interactive.”

Reilly said he will also take his class to Kyle Vissing Park, to compare the results of the older pond at Wathen to a relatively newer one. With this being the first year for the class, Reilly said he’ll use the notes from this trip for future classes to see if the ponds change over time.

He plans to also take his class on other trips — including a power plant — to bring more lessons to life as the year goes on.