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“MoRR Learning Festival draws praise from area administrators”

by Dave Marner

HERMANN — Dr. Chris Neale, superintendent of the R-1 School District in Hermann, said he'd love to be able to offer more “real world learning experiences” like the Missouri River Relief Learning Festival held last Tuesday and Wednesday in Hermann.

Teresa Ragan, principal at Owensville Middle School, said her only regret was not being able to take all of her students to the day-long festival which include land-based educational programs followed up by the chance to help clean up a section

of the river's shoreline. “I thought it was amazing,” said Ragan. “I wish I could have taken every student with us.”

Instead, the 60 from OMS who participated were involved in real-time skyping exercises where streaming video of their adventures was transmitted back to the school for their classmates to watch. Ragan said teachers and students at OMS viewed them on Smartboards through a “professional friends” Facebook page which educators use.

Owensville High School science instructors transmitted video clips of their activities on Oct. 4 back to the school's

iHigh.com site.

Ragan said the school-wide interdisciplinary unit taught prior to the event was a strong lead-in to the programs offered by local and state agencies such as the Soil and Water Conservation District, FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Stream Team, and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

And those land-based programs tied in nicely with the experience students had on the banks of the Missouri River as they had the chance to participate in a “service-based” cleanup along with River Relief staff and project crew members.

The group Ragan was chaperoning was transported a mile up river to a log rack pile by Jodi Pfefferkorn and immediately discovered numerous trees cut down by beavers. Pfefferkorn stopped the group by the stumps and talked about various animals found in the watershed. Later, she took the group for a boat ride into the Loutre River basin where they had the chance to see the infamous Asian Carp in action.

OMS students in a group chaperoned by Kevin Koppelman managed to catch several of the “flying carp” which landed in the boat and brought them back to school.

Neale, Ragan and Kurt Keller, principal at OHS, all thought the learning stations and “service learning” experience of helping with a cleanup project provided an educational experience beyond what their students could learn from a book.

“They were very professional and interacted well with the students,” said Ragan of the River Relief and agency personnel leading the programs. “This was a perfect example of a quality service learning project. I think the students and the teachers learned a great deal. I hope we can do it again next year.”

Missouri River Relief has moved on down to Washington this week. The group has scheduled a cleanup there on Saturday. The group will push the garbage barge and houseboat to St. Charles the following week and conclude their 6-week “Big Muddy Clean Sweep” with a cleanup on Oct. 29 at the Columbia Bottoms Conservation Area near where the Missouri meets the Mississippi.



Above: Owensville High School students (above, from left) Ray Page, Dalton Littrell, Steven Howard, and Jacob Piles move a refrigerator carcass to the bank of the Missouri River during a clean-up near Hermann conducted under the supervision of Missouri River Relief. **Below:** OMS Principal Teresa Ragan uses her iPhone3G device to skype video back to classrooms at the middle school as her group, The Rubber Duckies, travels upriver to a cleanup site. Kylee Mistler, Rylee Adams, Patrick Martin, and Mackenzie Hoffman are also pictured (from left). **photos by Dave Marner**

