

ESF Project Learning Tree Workshop Benefits Students, Teachers

The SAF student chapter at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) recently sponsored a Project Learning Tree (PLT) workshop to help students become more adept at sharing their forestry knowledge with young children and to help teachers conduct more interactive and informative lessons about the environment.

“Although participation in the workshop gives chapter members something that they can add to their résumés, it’s a good way for young foresters to learn how to share what they know in an age-appropriate way,” said Heather Engelman, CF, a graduate student and one of the workshop’s facilitators.

Joining Engleman as a workshop facilitator was John Graham, a forester with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

The ESF-sponsored workshop consisted of both indoor and outdoor sessions that featured such activities as “adopt a tree,” which encouraged participants to note the characteristics of an individual tree and help them appreciate the local environment, and “web of life,” which required attendees to investigate the ways plants and animals within a particular ecosystem are connected to one another.

A program of the American Forest Foundation, PLT is a multi-disciplinary environmental education program for educators and students ranging from Pre-K to grade 12.

The curriculum materials provide educators with activities and lessons designed to increase understanding of the environment, stimulate critical and creative thinking, and help students make more informed decisions on environmental issues. Topics range from forests, wildlife, and water to community planning, waste management, and energy.

In addition to learning from the information contained in the program curriculum, the teachers and college students who participated in the ESF-sponsored workshop also learned from one another, said Engelman.

“The mix of students and teachers lent an interesting dynamic to the workshop,” she said. “The students were very open with the teachers and willing to share their knowledge of forestry and the environment. The teachers were very forthcoming with ideas about adapting PLT activities for the classroom, and they appreciated the technological expertise of the students.”

Mike Tripodi, senior natural resources major and member of the ESF student chapter who attended the workshop last year, said that participating in the PLT program has made him a better environmental educator.

“I appreciated the opportunity to learn from teachers and other professionals in both education and forestry, and the experience helped me develop my teaching and presentation skills,” he said. “I work as a camp counselor during the summer, and the PLT workshop gave me a set of



ESF environmental interpretation graduate student Emily DeBolt creates a bark rubbing during the outdoor portion of the recent PLT workshop sponsored by the student chapter at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

tools to use in teaching school children about trees, the forest, and forestry.”

The teachers expressed similar sentiments about their participation in the workshop.

“Having a chance to share ideas for extending activities to tailor to different age groups was the most valuable part of the workshop,” said elementary school teacher Jennifer Holland.

Others, such as preschool teacher Kendra Harper, found the workshop “inspiring.”

“I am inspired and informed,” she said. “It is great to be reminded that tree products are everywhere and how we rely on our forests.”

ESF has conducted a PLT workshop each spring for the past three years, said Engelman. This year’s event, which had 13 participants, marked ESF student chapter’s second year as a sponsor.

According to the American Forest Foundation, PLT is a nationwide network of 3,000 grassroots volunteers and more than 120 state coordinators that work with formal and informal educators, school staff, state agencies, foresters, businesses, civic organizations, museums, nature centers, and youth groups to provide professional development programs. To date, more than 500,000 educators reaching more than 20 million students in the United States and abroad have been trained to use PLT materials.

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