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Studying a science career

ESF Science Corps trains new generation of teachers

July 18, 2003

By **Nancy Buczek**
Staff writer

Julie Cerny pulled a maple tree branch toward her Thursday morning, so the children gathered around her on a trail at Baltimore Woods in Marcellus could clearly see the leaves.

"What kind of tree is this?" asked Cerny, a senior at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

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"A regular tree?" tried Jalisa Griffin, 11, of Syracuse.

Cerny, 20, of Chatham, is one of four undergraduate students who worked with about 13 children from the Brighton Community Center to teach them about environmental science.

The four students are part of the ESF Science Corps.

The corps is a group of 12 students the college is paying through a three-year, \$1.4 million grant from the National Science Foundation to enhance and build upon ESF's 5-year-old ESF in the High School program.

The grant will supply fellowships for eight graduate students in addition to the four undergraduates.

Graduate students will receive a stipend of \$27,500 plus tuition and benefits, said Chuck Spuches, associate dean for ESF outreach.

The undergraduates will receive about \$10 an hour, he said.

"The whole idea is to recruit the best graduate students in science and engineering and to help them prepare for careers as scientists and engineers," Spuches said. "It's to prepare college- and university-level researchers and teachers who have had the benefit of working in a school-based context."

ESF received the National Science Foundation grant in February and selected the 12 fellows in April.

The program coordinators, fellows, and middle and high school teachers are developing the program this summer. It moves to classrooms this fall.

Three of the graduate fellows are new to the college. The four undergraduate students and five of the graduates already attended ESF, Spuches said.

The undergraduate fellows are working with students from local community centers at summer camp programs at Baltimore Woods.

They are also spending time with pupils from Roberts Elementary School in Syracuse.

During the academic year they will be working with teachers and students at the middle school level in the Syracuse school district to help students develop science fair projects for the districtwide science fair sponsored by the schools and ESF.

The fair takes place on ESF's campus in March.

Two years ago, about 40 students participated in the science fair, said Rick Beal, ESF's educational outreach associate. Last year, about 250 submitted entries, he said.

Heather Conway, 21, of Warsaw, will be an ESF senior in the fall. She said she applied for the fellowship because she enjoys teaching and saw this as an opportunity to test teaching as a career opportunity.

The undergraduate fellows are planning to make ice cream, using liquid

nitrogen to freeze it, at Roberts Elementary on Wednesday, Conway said.

They'll also have the pupils make chocolate chip cookies using a recipe that has the ingredients written using basic chemical composition, she said.

The graduate students will be working with the high school teachers involved in the ESF in the High School program.

That program gives high school students college credit for taking courses offered by high school teachers whom ESF faculty and staff mentor to be adjuncts for the college.

The graduate students will be working on research projects, guest lecturing in high school classrooms, taking students on field work and sharing case studies, Spuches said.

Beal said the overall goal for the graduate students will be to enhance learning in the high school classroom.

Thursday, as the children wound their way through a trail at Baltimore Woods, Jalisa Griffin spied a small round green nugget on the ground.

"That's from a black walnut tree. You can eat those in the fall," Cerny said. She scanned the overhead foliage for the source, found it and pointed the tree out to the group.

Later, Jalisa found her own small green ball and showed it to a girl near her.

"I found another black walnut," Jalisa said.

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