



The Alleghany Foundation Supports Environmental Education in Local Schools

Creating a butterfly habitat, making worm composts, and dissecting owl pellets are just a sampling of environmental projects that are providing academic support for local students of all ages while empowering them to take better care of their community.

Thanks to a \$50,000 grant from The Alleghany Foundation, Ellen Reynolds, environmental educator with the Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District, has been making the rounds in Alleghany County and City of Covington schools for the past 16 months, serving as an additional resource for teachers by helping them create outdoor classrooms. Programs like tracking the incredible journey of a water droplet, or observing and recording every living thing in a biodiversity grid, are engaging students in an interactive learning process that helps them problem-solve, reason, work as a team and understand how one thing impacts another in their environment.

On April 16th, Falling Spring Elementary School held an Earth Day celebration. Students, teachers and volunteers spent the day making compost with the school's new compost containers, purchased with Foundation grant money, and created a butterfly habitat. For the first stage of a butterfly's lifecycle, first graders planted parsley to feed the caterpillars. Second graders planted zinnias for the butterflies to eat after they leave their cocoons. Each grade added



something different to each of the projects, fostering team work and pride in their school, while learning grade-appropriate lessons in math, science, and English which coincide with SOL requirements.

Falling Spring's second grade teacher, Mrs. Byer, said she has seen great enthusiasm and interest from her students beginning with the birdfeeder they placed outside their classroom

window in the winter. "Every day we keep track of the birds we've identified and learn fractions by seeing, for example, how many wrens have come to the feeder compared to other birds. One day the children saw a bird they didn't recognize and, after we identified it, they couldn't wait to get to the internet to find out their food source." Byer said she is grateful that The Alleghany Foundation got the ball rolling. "We're excited about the student's motivation and heightened curiosity."

All Alleghany County and Covington schools have benefited from similar environmental programs. For example, Callaghan Elementary fourth graders planted Feverfew, Catnip, Sage

and other colonial herbs in preparation for the Virginia History Standards of Learning test, and Jeter Watson fifth graders made their own watersheds to learn about wetlands and water quality.

“Hands-on projects like these provide a different path to learning, benefiting students with varied skill levels and learning styles, and even motivating students who are bored, indifferent or at risk,” said Ellen Reynolds. “They establish connections to life outside of their classroom and can apply what they learn to real life issues.”



The programs also help students understand the impact they and their families have on the environment, and how to make small changes that will teach them how to conserve and protect natural resources. “In one class, for example, we talked about how throwing an apple core out the car window affects nature, while learning about the food chain,” said Reynolds. “A mouse is attracted to the apple by the side of the road. The mouse attracts a hawk, where both could be hit by a car. Students see that what they and their families do impacts the environment. They learn how fertilizers, anti-freeze, and other chemicals if not used correctly, are carried away by rain and deposited into rivers, lakes and other bodies of water flowing into the great Chesapeake Bay.” Reynolds added that one of the program’s goals is for younger generations to be better stewards of the earth, which in turn will benefit the community as a whole.

The Allegheny Foundation grant allows Ellen Reynolds to be in the city and county school systems 25 hours a week and provides for her transportation, project equipment like the birdfeeders, and continuing education for teachers.



“Students in the Allegheny Highlands have certainly benefited from the environmental education provided by Ellen,” said Beth Webb, executive director for The Allegheny Foundation. “It is rewarding to see the excitement of the children as they enjoy learning in the newly created outdoor classrooms.”

Reynolds is a facilitator for other environmental education programs like Project Learning Tree, Project WET, and Project WILD and was named 2006

Virginia’s Outstanding Educator of the year by Project Learning Tree. She has a degree in education and was an interpreter for Douthat State Park before joining the Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District.

The Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD) provides and promotes leadership in the conservation of natural resources through stewardship and education programs to Allegheny, Bath and Highland Counties. The organization is part of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and provides supplemental supplies for the programs. Supplemental funding for these projects also comes from the Izaak Walton League, local garden clubs, and MeadWestvaco.

Since its inception, the foundation has granted nearly \$26 million to the following 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations with the purpose of improving the quality of life in the Alleghany Highlands:

Alleghany County
Alleghany County Parks and Recreation
Alleghany County Public Schools
Alleghany County Sheriff's Office
Alleghany County United Fire and Rescue Association
Alleghany Health District
Alleghany Highlands Arts & Crafts Center
Alleghany Highlands Arts Council
Alleghany Highlands Community Services Board
Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Authority
Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation
Alleghany Highlands Free Clinic
Alleghany Highlands Genealogical Society
Alleghany Highlands YMCA
Alleghany Historical Society
Alleghany Humane Society
Alleghany Mountain Radio
American Diabetes Association
American Red Cross
Appalfolks of America
Art Museum of Western Virginia
Bath County
Bath County Health Department
Bath County Historical Society
Blue Ridge Public Television
Boiling Springs Elementary School
Boiling Springs Fire Department
C.O.P.E.
C & O Historical Society
Callaghan Elementary School PTO
Charles P. Jones Memorial Library
City of Covington
Clifton Forge Little League
Clifton Forge Main Street
Clifton Forge Nursery School
Clifton Forge Public Library
Clifton Forge Volunteer Fire Department
Covington City Schools
Covington Fire Department
Covington Rescue Squad
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
Diabetes Education Support Group
Falling Spring Elementary School PTO
Falling Spring Fire Department
Falling Spring Rescue Squad
Greater Alleghany Highlands School Health Consortium
Jackson River Enterprises
Jackson river Technical Center
League of Older Americans

Mill Mountain Theatre
Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District
Mountain View Elementary School PTO
Rockbridge Area Community Services Board
Safehome Systems
Science Museum of Western Virginia
Scott Hill Foundation, Inc.
Sharon Elementary School PTO
Sharon Volunteer Fire Department
Shenandoah Autism Center
Southwest Virginia AHEC
Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Foodbank
Special Olympics
Total Action Against Poverty
Town of Clifton Forge
Town of Iron Gate
Unified Human Services Transportation System
(RADAR)
West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine
Western Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council