

Budding Scientists Gather For “Jr. BioBlitz” in Ashford



State Ornithologist Dr. Margaret Rubega, left, helps Windham Middle School birders spot a red-winged blackbird during the “Junior BioBlitz” at Ashford’s historic Church Farm, where students helped catalog wildlife in early June.

About 150 budding middle-school scientists from Windham, Coventry and Sterling got a “book and boot education” on June 4th when they participated in a “Junior BioBlitz” on the 80-acre, historic Church Farm Preserve in Ashford.

“It’s got red on its wings!” a Windham Middle School student called out, as he spotted a bird across the Church Farm pond through his binoculars. It was a red-winged blackbird, Junior BioBlitz guide Dr. Margaret Rubega told the students. She is the state Ornithologist and a UConn associate professor.

Students had a rare opportunity to examine and catalog some of the farm’s diverse flora and fauna, thanks to the University of Connecticut’s Museum of Natural History, Eastern Connecticut State University, Joshua’s Historic and Conservation Trust and EASTCONN’s “Learning Lands” Interdistrict Grant program.

BioBlitzes are generally 24-hour, non-stop events during

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L-r: Retired EASTCONN Executive Director David J. Calchera joined author Gary Marx and EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen at the agency’s celebration at the Capitol Theater.

EASTCONN Celebrates Its 30th Anniversary

Nearly 100 educators, staff and state political leaders helped commemorate EASTCONN’s 30th anniversary during a celebration that included an interactive display of agency programs, student presentations and keynote speaker Gary Marx, who spoke about preparing for the future in uncertain times.

The theme was “Looking Back, Looking Forward.”

“Learning from the past is critical if one is to deal successfully with the challenges that lie ahead,” EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen told the group, as she spoke from the Capitol Theater’s main stage in Willimantic.

“In 1980, EASTCONN started with very few resources and very few employees,” said Colen, who has been with the agency since its inception. “But we were determined to grow and provide the highest quality services possible.”

“Today, we have 525 staff members,” she said, “and we offer 273 different programs and services for adults and preK-to-12 students. We also offer technology solutions, teaching and learning resources, and support services like communications, and planning and development.”

“Yet, at heart,” she continued, “we still hold the same values and maintain the vision that we did 30 years ago: that staff are our most important resource and that our mission is to support and facilitate partnerships, collaborations and regional solutions that are responsive to the needs of all learners.”

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View the EASTCONN Calendar
at www.eastconn.org and
Click on "Workshops, Events & Classes"

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Among the speakers who joined Colen for the festivities was EASTCONN's first Executive Director, David J. Calchera, who retired in 2005. Calchera noted that a hallmark of EASTCONN's success was its ability to adapt and respond to its districts' needs and to maintain a reputation for delivering quality services.

The audience was treated to poetry readings by Quinebaug Middle College students, a moving speech by an EASTCONN Adult Education student, in addition to seeing a compilation of original film clips and an animated short film, created by ACT arts magnet high school video students.

State Senate President Pro Tempore Donald E. Williams, Jr., 29th District, presented Colen and EASTCONN with a General Assembly Official Citation, congratulating the agency on its 30 years of service. The citation was introduced to the General Assembly by six state Senators and 13 state Representatives.

"I'm afraid it will take longer to read the names of the legislators who introduced this citation, than to read the citation itself," Williams told the audience, which elicited a laugh.

The celebration ended with keynote speaker Gary Marx, an educator, author and futurist, who discussed future trends that will impact education and communities around the world.



First Quinebaug Middle College Students Graduate in Small Ceremony



Quinebaug Middle College (QMC) graduated its first students during a small, school-day ceremony in early June. QMC students obtain their high school degrees, while earning college credits at Quinebaug Valley Community College (QVCC) in Danielson. QMC is administered by EASTCONN. Above, QMC graduates pose after the ceremony. Depicted, l-r: Guidance Counselor Melissa Jacobs; Amanda Barthelet, Thompson; Logan Kearney, Moosup; John Anthony DiRuscio, Thompson; Kearstin Hayes, Plainfield; and QMC Principal Gino LoRicco. Guest speakers included QVCC Dean of Students Dr. Susan Huard and EASTCONN Director of Student Services Tom Cronin, among others.



Depicted are some of ACT's talented writing students, whose work has earned them recognition this spring: l-r, Sarah Jacinto, Elle Schaffhauser, Brittany Doane, Anna Nassiff and Audrey Gidman. Missing is Benjamin Hoff.

ACT Student Writers Earn Kudos in Variety of Contests

EASTCONN is proud to announce that a number of its ACT arts magnet high school students have won recognition for their original works of prose and poetry this spring.

Anna Nassiff, a senior from Columbia, won the Connecticut Young Writers Competition for Windham County students for her prose submission, "Mrs. Warren in Color." Three other ACT students from Windham County, all freshmen, were finalists: Brittany Doane, from Woodstock Valley; Elle Schaffhauser, from Storrs; and Sarah Jacinto, from Colchester.

The Young Writers Competition is a project of the Connecticut State University System and the Connecticut Young Writers Trust. Each year, two students' writing submissions are chosen from each of Connecticut's eight counties; those winners compete statewide to qualify for a trip to Ireland related to the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Dublin Writers Festival.

In another contest, Sarah Jacinto's poetry also placed in the Connecticut Writing Project contest. Her poem will be published in the annual *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine, established decades ago to honor excellence in student writing. Also receiving honorable mention from the Writing Project were ACT students Audrey Gidman, a junior from Putnam, for her poetry; and freshman Benjamin Hoff, for prose, from Colchester.

This summer, Audrey Gidman will join Samantha Credit, a sophomore from Plainfield, at the Broken Bridge Summer Arts Workshop for creative writing at The Pomfret School, according to ACT creative writing teacher Lisa Taylor. Both students have earned scholarships. Gidman participated in Broken Bridge last summer, as well, Taylor said. It is a highly competitive program.

"We've had other students in the past participate," said Taylor. "It's a wonderful opportunity for them."

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EASTCONN Professional Notes:



Ruth Freeman

Ruth Ettenberg Freeman, LCSW, EASTCONN's Family Services Coordinator, recently participated in a panel discussion on strengthening and enhancing parenting skills for The Community Foundation of Greater New Britain's Catalyst Fund. The Fund serves Berlin, New Britain, Plainville and Southington.

Freeman was also invited to present a workshop on "Trauma Framework

and Evidence Based Behavior Management Strategies that Work" at the Connecticut Parenting Education Network's annual conference in Wethersfield.



Mary Jo Chretien

At the invitation of the state Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education, Mary Jo Chretien, MS, CCC-SLP, EASTCONN's Related Services Coordinator, served on an advisory committee examining critical issues in the field of speech and language pathology across the state. The group's findings will be shared with the CSDE, the Bureau of Special Education and the Comprehensive

School Personnel Development steering committee.



EASTCONN Facilitates Discussion of Law, Social Networks & Schools



Lawyer Anne Littlefield, left, makes a point during a presentation at EASTCONN about the legalities and pitfalls of social networking as they might relate to students, schools and the constantly shifting legal landscape.

Lawyer Anne Littlefield worked with EASTCONN this spring to bring valuable information to northeastern Connecticut superintendents about the changing legal landscape related to students, the Internet and social networking.

Littlefield made the presentation to an URSA/NASA spring meeting, attended by superintendents from across northeastern Connecticut.

Among the legal issues Littlefield discussed with superintendents were sexting, texting, staff-student e-mail, cyberbullying and all their attendant legal ramifications in a school environment.

Littlefield, who is an attorney specializing in education law with the Hartford firm of Shipman and Goodwin, Inc., met with EASTCONN employees and will continue to work with the agency this fall on a variety of Internet-related topics and issues of law.

Students Warn Other Teens About Internet Safety in NE CT



ACT arts magnet high school "Student 2 Student" volunteers were honored in June for their efforts to teach peers about dangers of the Internet. The ceremony took place at EASTCONN, Hampton.

Online predators. Sexting. Cyberbullying.

Discussions about these and other Internet pitfalls have become part of a national conversation about keeping students safe online.

With that in mind, the Connecticut State Police, the F.B.I. and representatives from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Connecticut partnered with the state Department of Public Safety on a 2009-2010 Internet Safety program called "Student 2 Student, in which high school sophomores and juniors make presentations to their peers about how to protect themselves online.

This spring, 24 students in the EASTCONN and LEARN regions, which stretch from the New London area to the Massachusetts border, delivered a combined total of 45 presentations to 39 schools and 11,657 students.

In the EASTCONN region alone, 14 student volunteers from EASTCONN's ACT arts magnet high school, Windham High School and Killingly High School, delivered Internet Safety assemblies to nearly 4,200 middle- and high-school-age students across northeastern Connecticut.

EASTCONN staff facilitator Noel Chemlen, who guided the EASTCONN-region Internet safety program, said her students gave effective, meaningful presentations that were well-received.

"It's great for teens to hear from their peers," Chemlen said. "They may be more inclined to listen."

Three Killingly High School students (junior Naydene Gomes, and sophomores Samantha Tickey and Heather Slattery) made presentations to a combined total of nearly 2,400 students at Woodstock Middle School, Killingly High School, Putnam High School, Killingly Intermediate, and Ellis Technical School.

Nine ACT students presented programs to a combined total of 855 students at Tolland High School, Putnam High School, Lyman High School, and ACT. The ACT presenters included Ryan Hebert, Colchester; Sadie Hopkins, Putnam; Megan Nelson, Hampton; Riley Smith, Plainfield; Breeanna Korcak, East Hampton; Bryanne Auguste, Stafford; Kody Mooney, Plainfield; Alexis Clavette, Stafford Springs; and Brittney Austin, Coventry.

Two Windham High School students (sophomores Samaria Gutierrez and Ernesto Rivera), made their presentations to a

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Summit Seeks Creative Ways To Collaborate Regionally

The Second Annual Summit on Regional Collaboration in Northeastern Connecticut drew 84 educators, school administrators, politicians and other community stakeholders, who met this spring to consider more cost-effective ways of funding the region's schools.

"We're really going to have to change," state Senate President Pro Tempore Donald E. Williams, D-29th Dist., told the group as they considered what the future holds for education funding in Connecticut.

Williams was among six panelists who discussed regional solutions that districts might consider as they work to meet state and federal mandates, provide high-quality education for students, and adequately fund schools. Educators and representatives from 22 towns and three regional school districts in northeastern Connecticut attended the Summit.

Summit panelists included Williams; David J. Calchera, policy director for the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS); Twyla Barnes, superintendent of Educational



Summit panelists agreed that communities will have to collaborate and get creative if Connecticut school districts are to fund government mandates, maintain high standards and educate students.

Service District 112, Vancouver, Wash.; Patrice McCarthy, deputy director and general counsel of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE); Chris Smith, legislative analyst, Rome, Smith & Lutz; and Peter C. Young, CFO, Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESAs).

The Summit's keynote speaker was Dr. Joseph M. Cronin. He was Massachusetts Secretary of Education.

After the panel discussion, small groups discussed the ways in which districts might collaborate to save money in areas like data management, essential services, advocacy, professional development and rigorous outcomes in schools.

Next steps will include the exploration of regional collaborations in transportation; health insurance; data management support to assess student learning outcomes; options for professional development and the creation of a common regional calendar to expedite that effort; and shared administrative services.

Contact EASTCONN's Director of Teaching, Learning & Technology Jim Huggins: jhuggins@eastconn.org; 860-455-1525.



ACT video students posed on CBS's "The Early Show" plaza in New York City with co-anchor Harry Smith, center, after the students were invited to appear on the morning show's outdoor segment.

ACT Video Students Win DMV Honors, Get "Face Time" on CBS

Five students from ACT, EASTCONN's performing arts magnet high school in Willimantic, were invited to appear on CBS's "The Early Show" after a video they produced for a statewide Department of Motor Vehicles contest placed them among 11 finalists.

"It was fun, exciting and brand new for all of us," said Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) Principal Tracy Goodell-Pelletier, who accompanied her students to New York City in April.

ACT students had submitted a public service video warning against the dangers of distracted driving to Connecticut DMV's second annual Teen Safe Driving Video Contest "From the Driver's Seat to the Director's Chair." The contest was open to all Connecticut's high-school-age videographers. There were 79 video entries statewide and the ACT video was among 11 finalists selected by the DMV; ACT's video received honorable mention.

The ACT videography students included Evan Fulton, a junior from Storrs; Josh Cranmer, a senior from Windham; Caleb Newell, a sophomore from Chaplin; Joey Schweizer, a junior from Marlborough; and Jeff Garland, a junior from Chaplin.

All of the Connecticut DMV video finalists were invited to stand on the CBS Plaza on Fifth Avenue in New York City, and be filmed or interviewed during the national morning show outside.

"We were there early and got close to the plaza fence," Goodell-Pelletier said, adding that about 70 other students from the DMV contest were also there.

"Our kids got to see how an outdoor TV segment like this is filmed, which was very interesting," she said. None of the ACT students was interviewed by CBS.

"But our students were shown on TV twice, and we knew that instantly because parents and friends back home were texting them. That was a lot of fun," Goodell-Pelletier said. ACT parents made the trip possible by donating time and money, she said.

Afterward, "Early Show" co-anchor Harry Smith posed with ACT students. To view ACT students' DMV video, visit www.eastconn.org/ACT and click on ACT Students in the Main Menu.

To learn more, contact ACT Principal Tracy Goodell-Pelletier at 860-465-5636 or tpelletier@eastconn.org.

EASTCONN Head Start Receives Community Outreach Award

EASTCONN Head Start has been awarded the University of Connecticut Community Outreach Program's Community Partner of the Year Award for EASTCONN's collaboration with the preschool program at Maple Street School in Vernon and the Jumpstart program.

"The award was made possible by the commitment of Vernon Public Schools and Maple Street School and the work of our Head Start staff – Jen Snyder, Suzanne Lynch and Sharon Lachendro," said Elizabeth Aschenbrenner, Director of EASTCONN's Early Childhood division.

"Jen took responsibility for coordinating with UConn and its students, while Suzanne, Sharon and Jen stayed after school, enabling Jumpstart/UConn students to work with Head Start children to improve their language and literacy skills," Aschenbrenner said.

"This was EASTCONN Head Start's third year of participation in the Jumpstart project and we look forward to continuing next year," she said.

UConn/Jumpstart students also do community service for Head Start, and help in the Head Start classrooms in Vernon.

The national, non-profit Jumpstart program is dedicated to cultivating children's social, emotional and intellectual readiness by connecting college students and community volunteers with preschoolers for yearlong, individualized tutoring and mentoring.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Aschenbrenner at [easchenbrenner@eastconn.org](mailto: easchenbrenner@eastconn.org), or call her at 860-455-1501. To learn more about Jumpstart, visit www.jumpstart.org.



CSDE's Coleman Visits Head Start



Seated above, center, George Coleman, Deputy Commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Education, recently visited the Vernon Public Schools' EASTCONN Head Start Collaborative preschool classroom at Maple Street School. It was a special visit to view the partnership and the integration of the programs. Coleman met with Vernon's superintendent of schools and other key program administrators.

ERA Hosts Wellness Expo with Variety of Activities



ERA seniors, all Windham residents, helped organize the school's health Expo this spring. L-r, John Piligian, Terries Thompson, Michael Gonzalez, Luisito Vargas and Shane Roman.

Eastern Regional Academy (ERA) students in grades 4-12 presented their first Wellness and Community Center Expo in April, creating an upbeat day filled with Native American dancing, health-related information booths, food and music.

For the ERA seniors who helped plan the Expo, academics played a critical role.

"Planning for this and making it happen allowed our seniors not only to provide a public service and collaborate, but also to do a lot of writing and create narratives to meet their Windham Public Schools senior project requirements," said ERA Principal Gary Lenoe.

ERA is a collaborative educational program between Windham Public Schools and EASTCONN, designed for students with special learning needs and those in need of transitional services. ERA enrolls about 45 students.

Students' families were invited to the Expo, which was intended to remind them about Windham's services and health agencies. Each of the Expo health and education booths, which were set up around the gym, was the result of a collaboration between ERA students and the service agencies.

Participating agencies included Community Health Resources; Generations and its dental health division, Across the Smiles, which provided free dental screenings and cleanings; University of Connecticut; Eastern Connecticut State University; Quinebaug Valley Community College; EASTCONN's Cool Directions program; Little Angels; Windham Town Hall; and ACCESS Safe Home. Other donations were made by St. Joseph Living Center, WalMart and Windham Middle School PTO.

One Expo activity in particular captured everyone's undivided attention as Little Angels' co-director and Mohegan tribal member Shane Long dressed in Native clothing and shared Indian lore, artifacts, music and dancing.

Lenoe said five ERA seniors had been instrumental in planning the Expo. He called them "shining stars." [They are depicted above.] "Our students were very engaged in helping make this day a success, thanks to their willingness to participate and their eagerness to learn," said Lenoe, adding, "they were well-supported by a great staff."

For more information about ERA, contact Principal Gary Lenoe at [glenoe@eastconn.org](mailto: glenoe@eastconn.org), or at 860-228-4317.

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which the biological resources of a property are inventoried to highlight the importance and value of different habitats. Volunteers collect samples, take photographs and record the site's biodiversity.

"Our students are being exposed to a variety of sciences, including ecology, biology, entomology, and herpetology and are applying book concepts in the field," said Dan Mullins, who helped organize the BioBlitz. This Jr. BioBlitz is a pilot program, Mullins said. He also oversees the Learning Lands grant program.

In groups of 10 or 12, students walked around the farm gathering information with the help of science guide volunteers from EASTCONN, UConn and ECSU.

"Students are learning how to conduct field investigations, collect data and how to interact with professional scientists," Mullins said.

"This is great!" he said, watching students tromp through the fields and note different bugs, birds, frogs and plants. "Kids don't get outside like they used to."

"It's a true 'book and boot' education," said Mullins. "What greater way to gain an appreciation for human diversity than to understand the importance and value of biodiversity?"

Interdistrict Grants are designed to bring together students from diverse backgrounds and to boost academic achievement.

The Church Farm has been designated by ECSU to be managed as a research area, so it's a natural fit for a Junior BioBlitz, said Mullins. A portion of the farm was given to ECSU and trails across the property are maintained by the Trust and open to the public.

"Also, the farm has a nice variety of habitats, including forests, ponds and vernal pools, so the site is highly biodiverse," he said.

Students used ProScopes, traditional microscopes, magnifying glasses and other scientific equipment on-site, along with informative displays and scientific collections. All the gathered information can be used in the future to determine if organisms are under threat, Mullins said, adding, "It is also quite possible that threatened or endangered plants and animals could be discovered."

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combined total of more than 925 students at Windham Middle School, Coventry High School, Parish Hill, Windham High School, and EASTCONN's Forensics 101 Interdistrict program.

Connecticut state troopers joined each presentation. Students dispensed Tip Line information and advice about handling difficult Internet-related situations.

A culminating celebration to honor the student volunteers from the EASTCONN and LEARN regions was held on June 1st in Hampton. A key organizer, Sgt. Jim Smith of the State Police Forensic Science Laboratory Computer Crimes unit, joined several Assistant U.S. Attorneys and others to present students with certificates. About 70 people attended, including parents.

To learn more, contact EASTCONN's Nancy Vitale at 860-455-1568, or at nvitale@eastconn.org.



EASTCONN Wins CABA Awards



CABA V.P. for Government Relations Richard Murray recently presented EASTCONN with numerous Communications Awards. L-r, EASTCONN Graphic/Web Specialist Cindy Laurendeau; Marketing & Communications Dir. Dotty Budnick; EASTCONN Board Pres. Herb Arico; Murray; EASTCONN Executive Dir. Paula M. Colen; and Writer/Editor/Media Relations specialist Teddie Sleight.



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EASTCONN, one of six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) in Connecticut, has been serving the educational and training needs of schools, organizations, and individuals of all ages in northeastern Connecticut since 1980.

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