Lake Superior 101

Western U.P. Science Center receives $175,000 grant

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HOUGHTON - Lake Superior is more than a place to boat and swim, it is also a learning tool.

The Western Upper Peninsula Center for Science, Math and Environmental Education has been awarded a $175,000 grant from a private foundation, the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, to continue and expand the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative. The initiative is an educational program that involves seven school districts, 11 schools, 43 teachers and 1,377 students in Houghton and Baraga counties.

Joan Chadde, the center's K-12 education and outreach program coordinator, said the grant is crucial to the program.

"This continuation grant is for 20 months, so it will continue until February 2010 at which point we'll have the opportunity to apply (again)," she said.

Chadde said the program offers professional development for teachers on how to implement lessons and community-based education about the Great Lakes in the classroom.

Chadde said K-12 classes do projects through the program that vary greatly. For example, projects include conducting beach cleanups, creating educational signage and developing trails and boardwalks, she said.

In many cases, students work with adults on the projects.

"The classes or teachers that are interested in being involved will partner with one or more organizations or units of government in their local community to meet a community need," she said.

Chadde said classes design a project and then apply for a mini-grant from the center for the support.

"In the past year and a half, we were able to provide the school team projects with up to $8,000 each," she said. "It funds the school/community projects and then it also supports the professional development for the teachers and it supports stewardship advisors working with the teachers. ... We provide assistance to the individual teams to help them develop their projects and implement them."

One project is a garden at the Public Schools of Calumet, Laurium & Keweenaw Elementary School.

"It was a project that they developed and their goal was to connect students with where their food comes from," she said.

All projects focus on the lake, Chadde said.

"Each project does that in different ways," she said. "It provides the freedom for creativity."

In the garden's case, it is organic, so students do not use pesticides and fertilizer that will negatively impact Lake Superior or its watershed, Chadde said.

Chadde said the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative is always looking for additional participants.

"New schools are always welcome to participate," she said.

For information about the center, visit wupcenter.mtu.edu or call 482-0331.

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