

Students receive hands-on river lesson

Ohio River Foundation seeks to raise awareness

By William Croyle
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After working for nearly five years as an environmental attorney for the city of Cincinnati, Rich Cogen decided last October that he wanted an office closer to the Ohio River - outside and right on the shore.

Cogen, executive director and co-founder of the Ohio River Foundation, welcomed students from Newport High and Fourth Street Elementary schools to the banks of the river Thursday at General James Taylor Park.

It was the sixth day of the Ohio River Foundation's Great Ohio River Paddle that started last Saturday near Portsmouth, Ohio, and ends this weekend in Rising Sun, Ind.

While a team from the group paddles down the river each day to raise awareness of the river's ecology, Cogen sets up his outdoor classroom along the route for students to learn about the waterway.

"There are certain restrictions working in government. Not having those constraints, I can be a more effective voice for the river," said Cogen. "This gives the kids exposure to the river and sparks their curiosity to ask questions and want to learn."

The Ohio River Foundation was founded in 2000. It is a nonprofit organization with a mission "to protect and restore the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River."

About 30 students from two chemistry classes at Newport High School stood along the shore listening to lectures from local college instructors and ecology experts. They also got their hands wet by testing chemical levels in the water.

"I learned a lot out here," said Stephen Swanson, 16, a junior who plans to major in the science field in college. "It means a lot more to be able to be out here and see it and talk to people who have degrees in this field."

While roughly 30 students from the fifth-grade class at Fourth Street Elementary also tested the water, they learned more about what lives in the river - like the 50 species of mussels - through lectures and samples of the marine mollusks.

"There are an awful lot of objectives we have to learn in a year and it helps to be able to bring the kids to the professionals," said their teacher, Lynn Roberts. "It also helps to have a different setting. It's a more fun learning environment."

One of her students, Alex Brown, 10, agreed.

"I like it out here because I've never experienced this before," said Brown. "I like the classroom, but this is a lot of fun being out here."

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