

Camp Wilkerson provides nature for sixth grade Outdoor School

By Jean Johnson
Special to The INDEPENDENT

"I know Australia is fresh in everyone's mind because of the Olympics. Right?" "Yeaah!" chorus 12 sixth graders who have chosen places at the picnic tables so they can see a dog-eared flip chart. Bill Eagle, who is Associate Director of the Columbia SWCD and has been teaching at the Camp Wilkerson Outdoor School since the late 1960s, knows how to be current even as he explains classic ideas of ecological balance to local youths.

It's a crisp morning in late September; one of those fleeting, golden days that dwellers in the Lower Columbia River region savor. If you tilt your head back you can see blue sky through a lacy crown of 100-foot Douglas fir trees. Everyone's gathered in a clearing to absorb what they can of Eagle's main message: Humans have the power to take care of natural resources and make the world a better place.

"Well, in Australia," he continues, "they imported some nice, furry rabbits, but guess what?" The man does a knee dip that incorporates his whole body and lifts his arms out wide. "There were no wolves or other predators that could keep numbers down, so the bunnies multiplied into a huge problem." He looks as if he's about to take flight from the very thought of the idea. The kids reward him with rapt attention, which is sustained to varying degrees as he moves into a discussion of how balance is also important when we think about soil and water.

He has props, charts, and various tricks to keep the students' interest as he tries to plant seeds of appreciation for our most elemental natural re-

sources. "Did you know it takes 500 to 1000 years to make an inch of topsoil?" he asks the group. "And it's getting made all the time by rocks breaking down and mixing with stuff like pine needles." He scoops up a handful of duff from the forest floor and holds it out for the students to inspect. "It didn't just get there by a bunch of dinosaurs pooping all over the place." The kids chuckle.

"And water's precious too," visibly energized by the students' involvement, he flips to a page on the tripod that has a diagram of a human body, showing 50-65% water content. "We have to have water to live. We are really just a bunch of old water bags!" Under Eagle's magnetic facilitation skills, the kids brainstorm what they can do to help keep water clean.

Before the formal session breaks up, students are treated to a last visual aid — a pyramid of life, with soil and water on the bottom, plants and animals in the middle, and humans at the top. "Now," quizzes Eagle, "who depends on who here?" Practiced now, the kids confidently dive into figuring out the dynamics of the chart.

Around a hundred sixth graders from Columbia County schools — this group is from Vernonia School District's Washington and Mist Grade Schools, where Outdoor School is part of the curriculum every year — are treated to a week at Outdoor School each year for a variety of activities designed to bolster awareness of natural resource management and conservation. Their interest and enthusiasm leave the unmistakable impression that this younger generation will do quite nicely when its members take their turns as natural resource stewards here in the Pacific Northwest.



County-owned Camp Wilkerson again contributed the atmosphere that helps students learn about nature as sixth graders from Washington Grade School listened to Bill Eagle during their annual Outdoor School last month. Students pictured include Brittany Lindauer, Jessie Long, Joreigh Landers, Nandi VanMeter, Amanda Mathews, Jacob Hales, Curtis Holabird, Ryan Peets, Jeff Paleck, Paul Ogden and Luke Johnston.

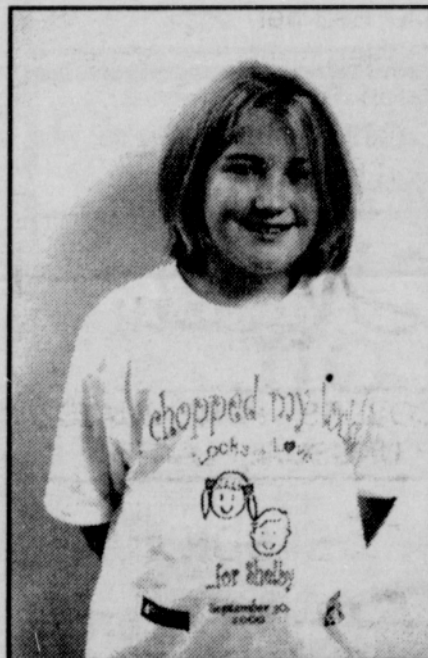
Locks of Love: Long tresses lopped to help others

Before...



Stella Maller's long, blond locks were sacrificed to help weave hairpieces for cancer patients who have lost their hair due to anti-cancer treatments.

After...



Stella Maller liked her long, blond hair, but she had reason to cut it off—actually, she had two reasons. Both of Stella's grandmothers, Anita Maller and Irish Bruers, have breast cancer and there's very little the 11-year-old sixth grader can do about it. So, when she heard about "Locks of Love" she knew it was her opportunity.

Locks of Love for Shelby started a year ago with a comment by Amy King, on KUPL radio's Waking Crew, about 4-1/2 year-old Shelby Lauderdale, who lost her battle with leukemia on Oct. 2, 1999. Since then, about 500 people signed up to donate their hair for wigs and hairpieces that will

Please see page 11

Free dental fluoride program again in local schools

Vernonia and Mist students in kindergarten to sixth grades will have the opportunity to participate in a year-long supplemental fluoride program administered at school. Students can begin the program at any time during the school year. Permission slips are available at each school office.

"King Fluoride" is a voluntary program sponsored by the Oregon State Health Division, which provides the necessary supplies at no cost to the children or the district. Each child who participates will receive one fluoride tablet each day that they attend school, and a toothbrush for the year.

"We see an average of one student per week with decay severe enough to create an abscessed tooth," said Vernonia dentist Dr. Scott Van Dyken. "The long range goal is to reduce decay overall, improve health and therefore reduce lost days at school due to dental disease."

Studies have demonstrated that the 60-second swish and swallow tablet regimen can re-

duce decay by 30-40 percent. It also strengthens permanent teeth forming in the jaw under the baby teeth. Parents will receive permission slips to sign and return to school.

VHS Site Council lates election

Kari Moeller and Rebecca Brookins are seeking election to two vacancies on the Vernonia High School Site Council. Elections will be held at the high school during parent-teacher conferences, October 4-6.

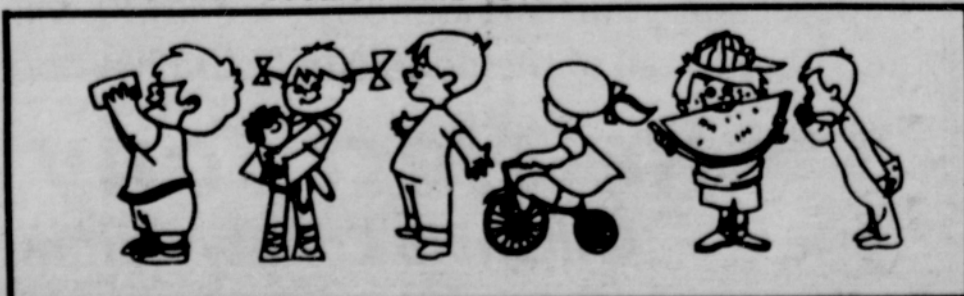
Any interested parent or community member is invited to vote. Broad participation by parents, students and staff is a key element in the success of our students.

Among the site council projects was the research and

completion of the school improvement plans that are required by the state. The plan is being used to make changes to improve the quality of education in Vernonia. The silent reading program now in place is a direct result of the work of the site council.

For further information regarding the "King Fluoride" program, call Dental Hygienist Pat Stacklie at 503-429-2675 days or 503-429-7563 evenings.

Anyone interested in the group's activities is invited to attend VHS Site Council meetings on the last Tuesday of each month at 3:15 p.m. The next meeting will be October 31.



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