

UWF and ECSD 2017 Environmental Science Partnership

Fourth Year Best One Yet

Future environmental health advocates presented their Capstone projects before a panel of local judges to wrap-up an 8-week summer program held at the University of West Florida (UWF). The UWF Environmental Health Scholars is a grant-funded partnership with the Health Science programs in high schools in the Escambia County School District (ECSD).

"This was our fourth year in this partnership and each year we have the pleasure of working with some amazing local high school students. They make me feel good about our environmental futures," said Aisha Adkison, Health Science Specialist, in the ECSD Workforce Education Department. "These students dedicated 3 days a week for 8 weeks of their summer vacation to learning more about our world and a vast variety of environmental challenges. They each select a research topic and prepare a Capstone project."

The program is funded on a subcontract for over \$100,000/yr for 5 years through the Gulf Region Health Outreach Program (GRHOP) administered by the Center for Gulf Coast Environmental Health Research, Leadership & Strategic Initiatives, School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine, Tulane University. The grant covers training for secondary education teachers from the region, specialized equipment and supplies for those teachers' classrooms and the summer program for students. Selected students spend three days a week at UWF with public health faculty, Dr. Enid Sisskin and Dr. George Stewart.

"Our high school students get to work with college professors who are experts in the field of environmental health, they get to be on a university campus for the summer, they learn, and they make friends. This experience helps prepare them to successfully continue their postsecondary education and training," said Adkison.

Students, each of whom receives a laptop and a variety of other incentives, spend one day working online, one day on field trips and one day working in class together with a variety of activities and learning the scientific process and hands-on procedures through competitions, games and expert speakers. They each also select a topic they want to know more about to research in depth. They earn credit for a high school level health science directed study class.

Sisskin told all of this year's class, "when it is time to work on recommendations to go with your applications to colleges I will be willing to help." She explained later that while they have been impressed with the students every summer, this year's group of students were standouts.

Stewart commented, "I have been impressed with the intellectual caliber of the students who have enrolled in this program. They have a solid grasp of the major environmental

perils the world faces and a firm commitment to investing their futures in addressing these issues."

Project topics included, the 21st Century War on Science, GMOs, pandemics, climate change, the dangerous cumulative effect of littering, storms' effect on the ozone layer, anthrax and a look at the U.S./Mexico border challenge from the perspective of its effect on animals. Another student took a hard look at anxiety and tied it to the other topics because, as she pointed out, how can any of us go out and fix any of these other environmental problems if anxiety keeps us trapped inside.

The team of judges reviewed their presentation boards and watched the students present, most with Power Point slide shows, and asked questions about conclusions and if the topics had inspired plans for the students' futures. Two students had to leave town, so they had recorded themselves presenting. All of the judges were very impressed with the depth of the projects and the confident and professional students. Selecting the top three for special recognition was a difficult decision and the judges even asked if they could have a tie because they were so impressed. Finally, a decision was made.

The results were:

1st Place: Madison Kemp, who is home-schooled and attends classes through the Florida

Virtual School. Her topic was: *The Effects of Man-made Climate Change on Global Health*. She won a plaque and a \$100 gift card to Amazon.

2nd Place: Tyra Williams, a rising senior in the Health Academy at Pensacola High School. Her topic was: *How Facts Became Opinions: The 21st Century War on Science*. She won a plaque and a \$75 gift card. She and her younger sister, who will enter high school this year, plan to apply for next summer's program.

3rd Place: Tyler Motts, an Environmental Science student from Pine Forest High School, who was one of the students who recorded his presentation ahead of time because he had to be out of town. His topic was: *The Environmental Impact of the US - Mexico Border*. He had researched how the border wall along the Texas/Mexico border has affected animals, their migration patterns and hunting grounds. He received a plaque and a \$50 gift card.

Statements made during the presentations started with facts, data, graphs and images. But project requirements also directed the students to reach their own conclusions, reflect on what they learned and state their opinions. One student did a great job of summarizing a conclusion shared no matter what the topic, "We need to care. Humans must take a stand, because we are our own worst enemy."

Photos are posted on Facebook, on the page, Escambia Schools Public Relations.

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ECSD prc 080117-2