

UR grad students, kids bond at science camp

Campers learn with experiments

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Staff Writer

The pier at Ontario Beach Park played host to walkers, bikers and young environmental scientists Tuesday as middle school students from Get Real! Environmental Action Camp spent the morning testing the lake water for bacteria.

University of Rochester graduate students studying biology and chemistry led small groups of local sixth- and seventh-graders, who made hypotheses about water health at Ontario Beach Park and learned how to use equipment to test the water at different points along the beach and pier.

Hosted by UR's Warner School for Education, the week-long science camp teaches the local students about science while acting as science-education preparation for the UR students.

Camp director Michael Occhino said he hopes the campers gain confidence in their future science activities from their experience at the camp.

"This gets them engaged in science and expands their horizons," said Occhino. "They would not ordinarily think of themselves as scientists, but now they've designed a question and can answer it themselves."

Eight campers were paired with eight graduate students at this year's camp. After huddling under a park pavilion to



Graduate student Teresa Long, left, with Katelyn Doucet, 12, laugh as Isaiah Hepburn, 12, gets a handful of algae with his water sample at Ontario Beach. The camp is put on by the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education graduate students who are studying to be science teachers. TINA YEE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

learn about water testing, UR students Andrea Polanski and Alejandra Perez armed their campers with cargo vests, roped buckets and "Whirlpaks"—or special water testing baggies—as they headed out onto the pier to take water samples.

"I hope that they see that science can be fun—that it's not just a bunch of knowledge put together that doesn't apply to real life," said Perez, whose team was called "The Healthy Lake Heroes."

Giuseppe Gulino, 12, said he was excited to find out what kind of bacteria was in the water.

"We're trying to get this beach off the top of the dirty beach list," said Giuseppe.

Ontario Beach Park is often closed due to high levels of bacteria in the water coming from the Genessee River. The campers will test the water collected Tuesday at a UR lab during Wednesday's day of camp.

Giuseppe said his favorite part of science was



Katelyn Doucet records the water temperature as grad student Teresa Long helps her. TINA YEE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

"making experiments, doing this kind of thing." He wants to be an FBI agent when he grows up, he said.

"That way, I can use science on dead bodies," he said.

Giuseppe and his fellow camper, Nautika Crawford, 13, tested the water on both sides of the pier by lowering buckets over the side, and then collecting water in Whirlpaks and cuvettes, which

are small glass tubes that can be instantly tested for cloudiness in machines called Datahubs.

Polanski said she

wants to show her campers what it's like to conduct a real scientific investigation, instead of just teaching them in a classroom.

"They're really planning and doing their own investigation instead of just sitting and talking," she said. "It's more fun and meaningful this way."

The camp wraps up on Friday, and is part of the larger Get Real! Science program.

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