

?If you see it for yourself ? you believe it?



Riley Hill, Josie Rowling and Kendal Carns team up to catch fish during the Wollaston Young Stewards Environmental Camp in Coe Hill held during the week of July 18. See more on page 6. / JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

For a child to be able to hold a real live little fish in his or her hand, look into its eyes, feel the scales, feel it wiggle and see the absolute beauty in nature right up close is not an opportunity a surprising number of youth have ever experienced. Twenty locally connected Wollaston youth aged nine to 12 attended the fourth annual award winning Wollaston Young Stewards Environmental camp this past week, and it was surprising how many had never caught a fish before.

?I was really really surprised, I actually caught a fish,? said nine-year-old Francisco Shin. ?I felt a tugging on my line ? and then I had a really good look at it.? As one of the local Ministry of Natural Resources enforcement officers helped him ready his line again, other nearby campers caught and released fish, frogs, and crayfish, and learned about the importance of habitat and a clean environment to survive.

The camp is a project founded and organized each year by a committee of volunteers under the umbrella of the Wollaston Lake Home and Cottage Association in partnership with Camp Kawartha. Richard Clark is the volunteer camp director, and leads the organization of a week full of activities aimed at experiential learning opportunities by exposing youth to local natural surroundings, and promoting an appreciation for their role as stewards of that environment. Clark and his committee have found sponsors for the project enabling all youth to attend without having to pay on a first come, first served basis.

The first camp four years ago was sponsored by *Cottage Life Magazine* after the local cottage association presented a successful proposal for funding. Now self-supporting, the camp has received widespread attention, and in 2015 Clark was asked to present the successful Wollaston project to the Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations annual general meeting in February 2015 in Toronto.

This year, campers participated in water studies at two sites led by the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority; hikes with activities promoting interest in tree identification and habitat preservation; swimming and water activities; a visit to Wollaston Heritage Centre, and ending with the trip to Petroglyphs Provincial Park.

?The focus for us is to bring outdoor education where the kids learn by doing it themselves, as opposed to teaching and telling,? said Clark. ?Going to the Wollaston Heritage Centre or Petroglyphs ties beautifully together with our aim. The stories are historical and

spiritual ? and create a reverence for the land.?

The youth were able to examine large softwood stumps, and count the rings backwards from the outside ring to learn the age of the tree. Then they learned of past historical important events in the township, and could actually find the ring that was created by the tree during that exact time. Rings were identified and little flags inserted for such events as the coming of the railroad to Coe Hill in 1884, the first cheese factory in 1906, the Havelock bank robbery case in 1961 where suspects were arrested in Wollaston Township. The stump will be donated to the Wollaston Heritage Centre when completed.

?I was really interested in learning about bees,? said Shin. ?How bees communicate with each other by sniffing their antennae ? or they dance in circles. You know, if we don't have bees, some plants won't be fertilized. One third of the food we have is pollinated by bees. If they are gone ? it's a big deal!?

Shin thinks about the bees a lot, he said. His focus now is to think about a healthy habitat for every living thing, not polluting and littering, and learning more. ?Some people can be quite reckless,? he said.

?At camp, we get to do it ? instead of just hearing about it,? said Shin. ?If you see it for yourself ? you believe it!?

?We hope you walk away today knowing a little bit more about your natural environment right here in Wollaston,? said Neil Fortin to the young people as they prepared to leave camp. Fortin is the head of outdoor education at Camp Kawartha.

The second installment of the weeklong camp for 20 of the younger age group will take place during the month of August.

The Wollaston camps are supported by many volunteers, and financially supported by Coe Hill Legion, Greenview Environmental Management, Bear Ridge Campgrounds and Cottages, Kawartha Credit Union, Wollaston Lake Home and Cottage Assn., Camp Kawartha and the Township of Wollaston.

Planning for the 2017 camps during the Canadian 150th celebrations is already underway, and Clark says they have some new and big surprises up his sleeve.