

15 girls to immerse selves in water study

Program surrounds young females in math, science

BY PAYTON WILLEY
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Kayla Caswell, 11, of Whitehouse will be among 14 other students at the Young Women's Summer Institute.

Ohio Supercomputer Center has selected 15 middle school students to explore and address complex environmental watershed issues that impact the state as participants of the Young Women's Summer Institute.

The institute's director, Kathryn Kelley, said that the girls will be immersed in science, technology, engineering, and math during an experience that will help get them interested in those fields as career choices.

The girls will be surrounded by women the entire week, from female scientists, to graduate and undergraduate students, naturalists, and even a

molecular geneticist. This will help to show girls that they too can participate in fields often associated with men.

During their stay on Ohio State University's campus this week, the girls are spending their days learning to test chemical properties of streams, taking field trips to various places including the Darby Creek, and learning how to apply the scientific method to analyze the health of Ohio watersheds.

Paula Williams, a seventh grade science teacher at Bowling Green Middle School, has been involved with the Young Women's Summer Institute program since it was established over a decade ago.

"I think it gives young ladies a chance to express their ideas in a setting where their peers are equal to them in interests and on an academic level," Mrs. Williams said. "It gives them a chance to place their values and morals up against science data and see how it all adds up."

Mrs. Williams said her favorite part of the program is taking the girls out to see the river, which the program uses to build up the rest of the week by showing how the river is not just a resource, but a true ecosystem.

One of the most important things that the girls walk away with during the program, Mrs. Williams said, is

confidence.

"Many times, the young ladies that we get are very bright and capable young ladies. We put them in a safe and comfortable environment and they take with them new opportunities to voice their opinions and share ideas."

The program is run through various sponsors including Battelle, American Electric Power, and the Ohio State University Campus Campaign. The girls pay a fee of \$250 each for room and board for the week.

Since the program's beginning, the girls coming in now are much more savvy when it comes to technology.

"The first girls we had when we started, they never used PowerPoint, and most of them never used a laptop computer. Now girls will come in and have their own laptops and use PowerPoint with even more bells and whistles and tricks than we knew about," Mrs. Williams said. "They maneuver through Excel and search the Internet like scholars, so now they're able to take it without us teaching the three basic skills of technology."

Ms. Kelley said that it is a competitive process when applying for the weeklong program. Students need to write an essay about their interest in the program as well as environmental science. They also need to get two teacher recommendations.

"We do a blind review of all their material, where all of the identifying information is removed and we assess their applications," Ms. Kelly said. "The teacher recommendations help to assess maturity levels of the girls."

About one in every three girls who applied were accepted into this year's program, including Kayla Caswell from Whitehouse, who is looking forward to making friends through the program. She had heard about it through a brochure that her mother had brought home from a computer technology conference and became interested.

Kayla, who will be entering the seventh grade in the fall, said her favorite two subjects in school are math and science and she would like to become a teacher.

Ms. Kelley said that a longitudinal study from 2010 showed that 75 percent of participants in the Young Women's Summer Institute indicated that their interest in math and science increased since their involvement in the program.

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