

Girls in Science



Safe to eat or not? Storer Camps outdoor educator Aly Johnson looks to make a determination on this small red berry.



Gwenevere Kraemer, a fifth grader at Ezra Eby Elementary in Napoleon, and Kendalyn Perry, a fifth grader at Addison Elementary, appear to be honing in on some birdlife.



Yum! It tastes like root beer! Well, maybe. These “Girls in Science” enjoy tasting the stems of sassafras leaves. They were taught what some safe wild edibles are to eat.



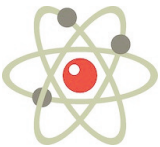
Honeysuckle berries or rose hips? They look similar. One you can eat (rose hips) and the other is poisonous (honeysuckle berries). Kate Campbell, a sixth grader at Columbia Upper Elementary School, left, and Genevieve Roekle, a fifth grader at Napoleon Ezra Eby Elementary, know that the shape of the leaves and the bright red color indicate they are honeysuckle berries.



Outdoor educator Mollie Thompson shows a bearded dragon to the attentive group of “Girls in Science” at YMCA Storer Camps.

Program empowers girls to explore male-dominated field

Story and photos
by John Hummer
Editor



They needed to have an interest in science. They needed to be girls. And they needed to be doing quite well in their classes. That’s all it took to be chosen as participants from area school districts to participate in the first ever “Girls in Science Weekend” at YMCA Storer Camps in Napoleon Township this past weekend.

The weekend was the brainchild of Dan Ross, owner of TransPharm Preclinical Solutions in Napoleon. The overall goal of the program was to provide a fun-filled safe weekend for the girls to be exposed to the sciences as well as empowering female students to explore traditional male dominated fields.

“I wanted to create a program that would focus on all of those qualities. I hope that your interest in science only grows stronger after this amazing weekend,” Ross said.

The weekend consisted of a select group of girls in 5th and 6th grade from all four schools in the Irish Hills area including Napoleon, Columbia, Onsted and Addison. The students participated in project-based science activities throughout the day as well as evening programs. In addition, the girls were exposed to career opportunities associated with the

sciences.

“We not only wanted to get them excited about science, but feeling empowered as a female and woman in science and have fun and spark that energy in them as well,” said YMCA Storer Camps program director Madeline Lombardo. “It’s primarily a male-dominated field. Women who have an interest in science don’t always explore those interests.”

In one program, “In Cold Blood”, the girls were introduced to various reptiles that are all different forms of cold-blooded animals. They had the opportunity to pick up and handle the reptiles while Storer outdoor educators taught them about the reptiles. In an outdoor nature hike, the girls learned what were safe natural edibles that could be found and eaten in the wild. A third program taught the girls about renewable forms of energy in Storer Camp’s Net Zero facility.

“The Girls in Science program honors some of the most influential people that I have met in my career that just happened to be women in science,” said Ross. “In short, my whole career I’ve been inspired by women. All of these women impacted me in a positive way and we need more of them.”

“I know that if you continue your interest in science, you may be lucky enough to change someone’s life someday and that starts now,” Ross said in the program’s introduction.



This little spring peeper was found trying to hide on this leaf. Doesn’t he know when it’s his season to be out?



Ezra Eby Elementary fifth grader Gwenevere Kraemer demonstrates how to eat the stem of a sassafras leaf. Unlike sassafras roots, the leaves do not contain a significant amount of safrole, a known carcinogen, and thus are safe to eat. Gwenevere is also holding a bowlful of wild grapes and rose hip berries for dessert after having her main course of sassafras leaves.



Girls in Science was brought to YMCA Storer Camps by Dan Ross, owner of TransPharm Preclinical Solutions in Napoleon. Ross credits several women in science mentors in his life for steering him to where he is today.



Storer outdoor educator Aly Johnson, far right, shows a group of “Girls in Science” how to take out the seeds of rose hips before eating them. Rose hip contains the seeds of the rose plant. Dried rose hip and the seeds are used together to make medicine.



Nevada Adams, a sixth grader at Columbia Upper Elementary School, appears to be right at home holding this rather large snake.