

River of Knowledge

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Zookeeper Colin Walker from Clyde Peeling's Reptiland talks about alligators and other reptiles.



Students (from left) Kali Mellin, Michael Clark, Cheyenne Black, Lauren Cunningham, Kelly Showmaker, Ryan Vaverchak and Porter Barnes demonstrate the connections between animals in a "food web."



Hashim Bilal (left) and Kyrin Bell paint a rubber fish replica as part of a fish printing art project.



Walker shows off a pine snake.

Creepy-crawly critters invaded the halls of Mayfield Elementary School recently. It was all part of the school's Water Festival, in which fourth- and fifth-grade students learned about the Lackawanna River and local environmental issues.

The celebration concluded a four-week watershed education program about the Lackawanna River, acid mine drainage pollution and aquatic life. During the festival, students held worms, acted out the "food web" and conducted water experiments. They used iron oxide, which drains from abandoned coal mines into the river, to create orange chalk, and they learned the anatomy of the fish while making fish art projects.

Presenters included an educator from Lackawanna State Park, Conservation District employees and AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers from the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team.

One highlight of the day was the presentation from Clyde Peeling's Reptiland, a zoo in Allenwood, Pa. Zookeeper and lecturer Colin Walker used a live tortoise, snakes, an iguana and even a baby alligator to teach the students about the reptiles that live in Pennsylvania and around the world.

"Even though many people fear these animals, reptiles are very important to humans because they control the rodents, who take our food, destroy our buildings and carry disease," Walker explained.

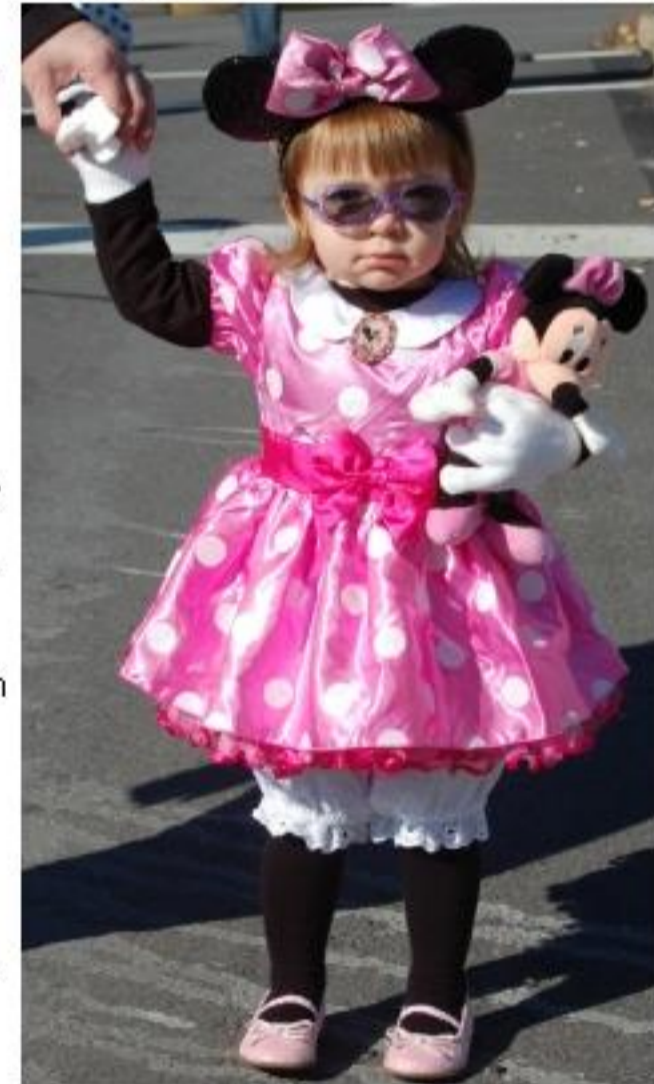
The program was funded by a Meaningful Watershed Education Experience grant from the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts. Fourth-grade science teacher Maria Proch partnered with the Lackawanna County Conservation District to create the program. The program was organized by Watershed Specialist Alana Roberts and Office of Surface Mining VISTA volunteer Lindsey Ritchey. For more information on the county's watershed education programs, call 281-9495.

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