



Saint Viator Students Make a Splash at the Chicago River Student Congress



Seniors John Sandmeier and Kelly Sullivan discuss their research for the 13th annual Chicago River Student Congress.

As biologists intensify their search for signs of non-native Asian carp in Chicago area waterways, the research compiled by Saint Viator High School environmental students becomes more important.

A group of seniors presented their findings completed last fall on the Chicago River watershed and its ability to sustain life at the 13th annual Chicago River Student Congress, held at Amundsen High School in Chicago.

“We looked at the different organisms that can survive in the river, as well as its pH levels and the turbidity of the water,” said senior Kelly Sullivan of Inverness.

Although they ultimately determined the water quality to be “fair,” senior John Sandmeier of Barrington Hills found some troubling indicators.

“My waders were covered in leeches,” Sandmeier said. “They can only survive in very polluted water.”

The seniors presented their findings to different school groups that attended the congress, as well as environmentalist organizations on hand.

“It allowed them to share what they learned with a larger audience,” says teacher Vicky Giusti. “And it exposes them to the real side of environmental science, giving them a clear idea of how to apply what they learn in the classroom in their daily lives.”

For their study, they partnered with members of the Friends of the Chicago River, who are in the midst of a restoration project to preserve the river as a plant and animal life habitat --- for its native species.

Saint Viator students conducted their fieldwork at the river’s north branch, at the Linne Woods site in Morton Grove, where they did find a number of large invertebrates such as crayfish and clams, though no sign of any variety of carp.

“It’s an important waterway to the whole Chicago area, though for the most part, it’s so polluted not a lot of people want to test it,” Sandmeier added.

At the congress, Saint Viator students toured other presentations, including one on Bubbly Creek, or the south fork of the Chicago River watershed.

“It’s so polluted, there’s literally acid coming up on the shore,” said senior Jonathan Coath of Barrington.

Saint Viator students have conducted research on the Chicago River for the past several years, but this was the first time they made their findings public, taking them outside their school laboratory.

While they say they were happy to share their findings, they will leave the Asian carp problem --- including the latest proposal to close some of the river’s locks in order to preclude their entry --- to the experts.