

Walker Valley REFLECTIONS

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WHATEVER IT TAKES

*By Alicia Hunsberger
Cherokee Bend Elementary*

It is refreshing to attend Tremont each year with students from Cherokee Bend. We all get excited about traveling to the Great Smoky Mountains to experience the outdoor classroom. Every year brings both mystery and challenge as we plan together for months prior to taking the infamous trip. Glenn Rice, our fearless leader and social studies

teacher, along with the other fifth grade teachers coordinate with the Tremont staff to ensure an experience for the kids that is both meaningful and memorable. As a special educator, I greatly value the Tremont staff—their expertise and their willingness to make every effort to include all children in an outdoor learning experience that is monumental.

This year was particularly interesting because we had plans to take two students with significant physical handicaps. Our adaptive physical education teacher, Keri Petrofsky, offered her expertise in disabilities to ensure safety and fun for all kids participating. In

addition to their sleeping bags, extra tennis shoes, warm clothes, and flashlights, Ward Webb and Will Kirkpatrick were packing multiple wheelchairs, shower chairs, and prosthetic legs.



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Tremont Congratulates 2007 Outstanding Educator and Outstanding Scientist for Biodiversity Education

By Jason Love, Citizen Science Director

For the fifth consecutive year, Discover Life in America (DLIA) announced its Outstanding Educator and Outstanding Scientist for Biodiversity Education at the 11th Annual DLIA conference. These two awards are presented to an educator and a scientist who excels in sharing information about the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI) and inspire their students to explore not only the park, but also their schoolyards and backyards for biodiversity. Like many of the previous award winners, this year's awardees have close ties to Tremont.

The Outstanding Biodiversity Educator for 2007 is Gabrielle Riesner. Gabrielle is a science teacher at Mountain Heritage High School in Burnsville, North Carolina. Gabrielle brought her class to Purchase Knob for a field trip and organized an ECO club that instills in her students a deeper understanding of ecology and biodiversity. Gabrielle also was an enthusiastic participant in the Smoky Mountains Science Teacher Institute, held at Tremont, where she incorporated many of the skills and activities from the workshop with her students.

The 2007 Outstanding Scientist for Biodiversity Education is Dr. Paul Bartels, Warren Wilson College, North Carolina. Since 2001, Dr. Bartels has consistently worked closely with the Resource Education staff in North Carolina to develop a number of programs on the ATBI and Tardigrades (water bears). Dr. Bartels has worked with 8th graders at Purchase Knob during the summer and arranged for his undergraduate students to assist in developing protocols for high school students on the Cherokee reservation. In 2007 he spent a day training Cherokee middle school students how to collect, isolate, and study Tardigrades. The students were so inspired by Dr. Bartels that they spent six hours the next day designing and implementing their own scientific study that assessed the response of Tardigrades to liquids of various pH levels. Dr. Bartels also teaches a very popular Tardigrade exploration workshop during the Smoky Mountains Science Teacher Institute at Tremont, where his presentations are always well received.

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Will Kirkpatrick, a student with Spina Bifida, was excited to get to experience the outdoors along with his classmates. We had the opportunity to rent an outdoor wheelchair, called the Terra Trek, in order to allow him to participate in every activity. The Terra Trek is an all-terrain wheelchair. It has larger wheels that are able to roll over different types of landscape, including large roots and rocks. The front of the chair has unique poles that allow the chair to work as a rickshaw, similar to a wheelbarrow. This provides people helping with the chair to assist with more ease than pushing from the back. Will was able to assist in pushing as well. All the students from Will's class worked together to ensure that everyone made it on the All-Day-Hike and through Cades Cove. Will said that his favorite activity was the All-Day-Hike. "It



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was pretty awesome getting to participate and I never could have done it without the Terra Trek and all of my friends," says Will of his experience. Some of the narrow passages were more difficult to get through, but it was amazing to see the kids wanting to take turns to assist Will in this adventure.

Ward Webb is another fifth grade student at Cherokee Bend. Because of an injury at age four, Ward lost both of his legs. That has not stopped him from doing anything. He is determined to get to do it all, and his legs certainly did not keep him from participating at Tremont. Ward has two prosthetic legs which enable him to participate in activities with his peers. Ward had difficulty choosing one favorite experience. When asked to describe his favorite part of Tremont, he responded, "Well, I loved Cades Cove; finding thirteen salamanders was cool too! I almost forgot

that I loved the solo sit, and the food was great!" Ward had access to his wheelchair, but was able to make it through the week without using it once. Frequent breaks and sock changes were more important for him, in order to rest his legs and keep from getting sores.

These students are an inspiration to us all for their commitment to make it work regardless of the circumstance. Cherokee Bend is extremely thankful for Tremont's flexibility and willingness to let us try something new with these students. Michael and Jeremy helped to make accommodations as we were making stops to adjust the Terra Trek or replace leg socks that keep Ward from bruising. There is a commitment at Cherokee Bend to do whatever it takes for students. It was a blessing that Tremont joined in our efforts to make this work for all students and provide a safe, learning environment. At the end of the day, we were all physically exhausted, but the challenge was thrilling and the learning adventure was certainly worth it!

Tremont would like to offer outdoor wheelchairs such as the Terra Trek to program participants on a regular basis. Can you help? If interested, please contact Meredith P. Goins at (865) 448-6709 or meredith@gsmiit.org