



Jessica Selby • Daily Times

Amanda Studley (from left), Ghyllian Conley, Nicole Testa, Danielle DiPippo and Kimberly Garder of the Coventry High School Envirothon Club celebrate their state-level Envirothon win. They will be competing in the national challenge in Asheville, N.C. from Aug. 2-8.

# CHS group to try at national title

## Envirothon students looks to build on team's successes

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COVENTRY — Like most after school clubs they compete, but, for this group, there is no athletic ability required.

They spend their time identifying trees, animal species, soil substances and water compounds, and they are in fact, quite good at it; so good that they placed number one in the state competition.

An all-girls team from Coventry High School's Envirothon Club entered the state's Envirothon competition earlier this year and won first place.

The girls had to take written and hands-on tests on forestry, aquatics, wildlife and soils and then do an oral presentation on biodiversity.

The girls, Ghyllian Conley, Nicole Testa, Amanda Studley and Kimberly Garder, all recent graduates from the school, and Danielle DiPippo, now a senior, were not newcomers to the competition; in fact, all had competed previously, but still said that it was a challenge.

"The first year that you join the club is the hardest because you have so much to learn, but once you learn that stuff, it is basically just review," said DiPippo. "So for most of us that have been in the club for three or four years, we just had to review the information to get ready for the competition. It is the oral presentation that takes the most work."

Studley said the oral presentation is quite "time consuming." She said this year they were required to create a wildlife management rescue plan for Ninigret Wildlife Refuge. This, she said, is a 700-acre

naval auxiliary air base that the contestants had to transform back to its natural habitat. Testa said the group had to restore grasslands, create a management plan for animals and make the space accessible for humans.

The team members said they were not able to use any technology to present their project, but were able to use any other sources of visuals. They opted to use a three-fold poster board and two half-sized poster boards, which they covered with various photos of the area, and a blow-up map of the area.

After taking the test and presenting their oral project, the girls said they were fairly confident that they had done well.

"Because this was our fourth year competing with almost the exact same team, and we had already made it to nationals twice, I was extremely boastful that we had this," Testa said. "And to be honest, it was a good thing that we won because I was being pretty cocky and just saying things like we had it in the bag!"

Well they did. The Coventry team, which went to the competition outfitted in t-shirts that read "Coventry Team Awesome," won at the state level and will be going on to nationals to represent Rhode Island in the nationwide competition, which is scheduled to be held in Asheville, N.C. from Aug. 2 through the 8.

Testa said in the previous two occasions that the Coventry team made it to the national level, they did not do as well as they would have liked. She said this year, however, the team is committed to making a big impression.

"The national competition is much more intense," Testa said. "It is five days straight of stuff."

"We attend workshops on the information that we will be tested on during the day, then we have dinners and other events in the evening, then on the third day, we take the tests, then on the fourth day we have an orientation on what the oral presentation is going to be and then we are locked in a room with only our team for eight hours," she said. "In that time we have to complete our oral presentation and then on the fifth day we present and that night, winners are announced, there is a formal awards ceremony and then it's over."

"It is non stop for five days straight, but it is so much fun," she said.

The team members said each year they have attended; they have made "wonderful new friends," and enjoyed "amazing experiences." Despite the fact that it requires studying and doing research during the summer months, the team members said they would never pass up the opportunity.

"I am majoring in environmental science at Northeastern next year so this is something that I am interested in and do not really look at it as work," Conley said.

Testa, who is planning on studying sustainable agriculture at the Warren Wilson College, said she too just finds the subject interesting and enjoys being a part of the group despite its time-consuming commitments.

"We are all a part of the Earth and, as corny as it sounds, it is nice to know what you can do to help



# Environmentalists fundraising for trip

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protect and preserve it. I just think it is a really interesting subject and it is what I want to do with my life anyway so it just works for me," Testa said.

Even though the girls secured their place in the competition, they still have to fund their way there. The program pays for their stay at the competition, but they have to raise enough money to pay the \$800 registration fee, their travel costs to get to the competition and food and living expenses.

Testa said she estimates that the entire trip will likely cost the group and the two advisors who will accompany them approximately \$3,000. Last year when the group traveled to Flagstaff Arizona for nationals, they organized a fundraising

breakfast at Dave's Bar and Grill to help offset the cost of the trip and this year, Testa said they are planning a similar event.

The breakfast this year will take place on Sunday, July 26, at Dave's Bar and Grill on Post Road from 8 to 10:30 a.m.

According to Testa, tickets can not be sold at the door, so if anyone is interested in going they should contact Sally Paul at 401-480-1455.

Helpful information to know, Testa said, is that there will also be a 50-50 raffle and tons of raffle items like gift certificates to local hair salons, restaurants, liquor stores and more for people to purchase.

The team will be leaving for the national competition on Aug. 2 and will be returning on Aug. 9.