THE HAPS ON MAPS

Photos by Kendra Gravelle

Joseph Lucian, principal at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School; Molly Wentworth; Peter Stetson, facilitator of Educational Mapping Service; Matt Fountaine; Andrew Fiocco; Courtney True; Charlie Blanchette, a social studies teacher at the middle school; Amanda Dion; Kerry Medeiros. The students all took part in a statewide interactive mapping competition.

Feinstein School students use technology, big data to bring maps into 21st century

By KENDRA GRAVELLE

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COVENTRY — He loves the outdoors, and eighth-grader Matt Fountaine hopes to someday pursue a career as an environmental police officer. And it was that fascination with the environment that inspired his award-winning project outlining Rhode Island's conservation areas.

"I just like to be outside," said Fountaine, an Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School student who's been named the school's winner in the 2019 Rhode Island Statewide Mapping Competition for a story map he made using geographic information system (GIS) software.

Created through the school's ArcGIS organizational account, Fountaine's interactive story map features all sorts of useful information about the various conservation lands that dot the state.

"For the longest time I thought there weren't many [conservation areas]— that it was limited to Big River and Arcadia," Fountaine said Tuesday, adding he quickly learned there were many more protected areas than he'd thought.

Fountaine's Rhode Island-based GIS project was one of five at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School to receive awards. Each was chosen by an evalu-

Matt Fountaine, an eighth grader at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School whose story map took first place in the school, with Peter Stetson, left, and Charlie Blanchette.

ation committee tasked with choosing the school's best story maps.

Checks were awarded for each winning project, with students who worked in pairs each getting $50 and those who worked solo receiving $100.

Charlie Blanchette, a social studies teacher at the middle school, called GIS "the technology of the 21st century,"

adding that he's striven to incorporate i into his curriculum.

"It's a great resume builder," Blanchette said, adding GIS "really helps buil critical thinking skills."

Blanchette last summer took a workshop led by Peter Stetson, facilitator of

Maps

Educational Mapping Service, on how to use GIS, and in turn over the last year has been teaching it to his history students.

"Almost every industry in the United States uses GIS in one form or another," Stetson said Tuesday, as eighth graders arrived in the school library to receive their certificates and checks. "You can incorporate it into English, you can incorporate it into science, you can incorporate it into social studies."

Stetson, who taught environmental earth science at Coventry High School for 35 years, likened story maps to PowerPoint presentations consisting of various slides that use text, images and multimedia content to tell a story.

Eighth graders Amanda Dion and Courtney True, for example, created their story map to compare Coventry High School to Classical High School, which U.S. News and World Report recently ranked the top high school in the state.

"We just looked at all the differences between the two," True explained of the project, which examines factors like demographics and drop-out rates.

Liberty Metivier and Molly Wentworth, meanwhile, built their story map to compare the Warwick locations of Dunkin' Donuts, Honey Dew Donuts and Starbucks.

"We just wanted to see how many there were and show where they were in comparison to the rest of the town," said Wentworth, who added that she's an avid coffee drinker – though she noted she is a fan of Starbucks, in particular.

While that project was inspired by a love of coffee, a story map by Kerry Medeiros was made to increase convenience for Rhode Island drivers.

"You hear a lot of bad stories and complaints about finding [the Department of Motor Vehicles] DMVs," explained Medeiros, whose project looks at DMV and AAA office locations, providing directions and phone numbers for each.

Another story map, by Andrew Fiocco, features a compilation of Newport historical sites. It includes interesting tidbits and highlightes the historical significance behind each place.

"I thought about how much I was into history, especially the historical sites that date back to the late 1700s, early 1800s," Fiocco said of his inspiration for the project.

Stetson pointed out that Fiocco was able to access much of his required information through GIS data shared on the City of Newport's website.

As for Fountaine's map, it's been submitted to the state and could ultimately be chosen for submission to the nationwide ArcGIS Online US School Competition sponsored by The Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI).

Stetson said both Fountaine's and Fiocco's maps—Fiocco's came in second place—are loaded with useful tips and are "very well put together."

Just after the students were awarded their checks and certificates, Joseph Lucian, principal at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School, said he was proud to see the hard work put into each of the projects.