

# Water (questions)?under the bridge

March 1, 2011 - By STACEY KUKKONEN, [skukkonen@mininggazette.com](mailto:skukkonen@mininggazette.com)

PAINESDALE - Students at Jeffers High School recently experienced a first - they traveled downstate in February to participate in the Great Lakes Bowl for the first time ever.

Science teacher Cindi Ruotsi said the bowl is much like high school quiz bowl, only the students were asked questions about water, oceans and marine wildlife.

"It was a great opportunity," she said. "There were a broad range of questions that focused on oceanography questions. It ranges from oceans to biology to chemistry and geology."

Ruotsi said Jeffers High School was the first western Upper Peninsula school to attend Michigan's statewide Great Lakes Bowl and the five-person team consisted of students Jacob Keranen, Eric Coon, Adrianna Coponen, Sarah DeForge and Noble Rundman.

"I took four 10th graders and one ninth grader," she said. "I opened it up to my biology classes and I asked them if they would be interested in attending."

Coached by Ruotsi along with assistant coach Kyle Oberle, a freshman at Michigan Technological University and member of last year's winning team from Dexter High School downstate, the team drove down to Ann Arbor Feb. 4 to compete on Feb. 5.

"We left on Friday and competed Saturday," she said.

After a little bit of quizzing the night before, Saturday morning, the team arrived at the University of Michigan Natural Resources building where they received T-shirts, bags, hats and other goodies.

"The morning was broken up into four round robin tournaments," she said. "During each tournament, students had six minutes of toss-up questions. Each question was worth four points. The team that answered correctly was also given a bonus question, which was worth an additional six points."

After the six minutes, students were given a time limit of three to five minutes before judged. Ruotsi said the experience was valuable and the students agreed they felt they learned something from the experience.

"They had a blast," she said. "We didn't really have a whole lot of time to study. We had about a month to practice."

Although the team didn't win any of the round robin tournaments, they were just six points shy of beating one team, she said.

"The afternoon consisted of single elimination tournaments," she said. "We were last place, which meant we had to face off (with) the first place team, which happened to be our assistant coach's alma mater, Dexter High School. It was a tough round, but the students had fun with it."

After elimination, the students took advantage of their time in Ann Arbor, touring the Marine Hydrodynamics lab at the University of Michigan, she said. They also learned about competitions U of M students participate with, and the labs they use.

"We learned that with some special data-recording buoys, waves about 35 feet high were measured just off shore near Houghton," Ruotsi said.

While watching the final four teams as part of the tournament, the Jeffers team realized how much studying will need to be done to participate next year. During the Awards Ceremony, Jeffers High School won the Quagga Mussel Award, she said.

"Sander Robinson, the organizer of the event, explained that the quagga mussel is an invasive species," Ruotsi said. "He compared our school, one of the first Upper Peninsula teams, to the invasive mussel. He noted that although we hope that real invasive populations don't grow, that the Great Lakes Bowl would like to see our team grow. As our prize, we received a Zeecraft buzzer game system for eight players. We promised to go home, practice lots, and return in full force next year."

Ruotsi said the overall experience was positive and the students walked away with knowledge of what to expect next year.

"We are hoping to recruit new members throughout this year and into next year, and possibly bring a second team down next year," she said. "Now that we have our buzzers and some semblance of an idea of what to expect, we'll be much better prepared for a competitive second season. Kyle has agreed to volunteer his time and knowledge again next year to help us reach our goal."

Regional Hosts were NOAA, Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, Cooperative Institute for Limnology and Ecosystems Research and the Michigan Sea Grant.

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National hosts/coordinators included Consortium for Ocean Leadership and National Marine Educators Association.