

# Students converge on MTU for Great Lakes Youth symposium

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By STEPHEN ANDERSON , Houghton Daily Mining Gazette

HOUGHTON - Middle and high school students will soon make critical decisions about the future of the Great Lakes.

About 200 of those students from around the region will have a wealth of tools to make those decisions after four days at the 10th biennial Lake Superior Youth Symposium, hosted by Michigan Tech University.

"Nobody says you must have a Lake Superior Youth Symposium. We just do it because we love it," said Joan Chadde, education/outreach program coordinator for Tech's Center for Science & Environmental Outreach, during Thursday's opening ceremony in Fisher Hall. "We love Lake Superior, we love the Great Lakes and we want you to love it, too. We know by creating an experience like this we're hoping you'll remember it for the rest of your life."

More than 50 presentations will be delivered during the four-day event, which will also include interactive field trips and group activities. The 200 students represent 24 different schools, including districts from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Ontario. From the Detroit area, Harper Woods High School students came the farthest.

Students from Dollar Bay, E.B. Holman, L'Anse, Hancock, Houghton, Jeffers, Lake Linden-Hubbell, Chassell and Calumet represent the local area. Houghton has the largest group with 21 students. Jeffers has the longest attendance history, every symposium since 1999.

Several speakers challenged the students during the opening ceremony, including MTU President Glenn Mroz. He cited a World Economic Forum poll of 1,000 people that asked what are going to be the most important things that affect people in the world over the next 10 years.

"What I was surprised at when I saw this ... the two things that will impact people the most and are most likely to happen "is that there will be greater economic disparity, bigger difference between rich people and poor people, and the other thing is that there's going to be a global water shortage, a fresh water shortage, which is a little hard for us in the middle of the Great Lakes sometimes to understand," Mroz said. "If these 1,000 people around the world are right, you guys are going to be graduating from college about the time some of these problems start to really materialize in a significant way. You're going to be expected to be able to help solve those problems."

Esie Leoso-Corbine, a Lake Superior Chippewa Bad River tribe member who first spoke at the symposium in 1995, challenged the students with protection of the sacred water. The grand chief of her lodge told her "someday an ounce of water would be worth an ounce of gold."

"When he said that, I at 27 years old, thought to myself, coming from Lake Superior, coming from Bad River, I thought, 'Are you kidding me? Are you trying to use the fear effect on us?'" she said. "In my lifetime I have already seen that (start to) unfold."

Jan Sneddon, director of community partnerships with Earth Force, one of the event sponsors, challenged students with the message that they can make a difference even at their age.

"Our mission as an organization aligns perfectly with the youth symposium, really giving an opportunity for young people to share with each other the experiences they've had, learn new skills and give them the power and the knowledge to go back to their communities and actually implement everything that they've learned," she said, noting that students would be using Earth Force's six-step problem solving process throughout the symposium events.

Students will hold team meetings each day to discuss what they learned from different sessions, with the objective of settling on a project to take home to their own communities.

"Our common bond is Lake Superior," said Chris Hohnholt, director of development and outreach for Tech's School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science, as he closed the opening ceremony. "Some of us are scientists, others artists, some policy 'wonks.' Meet someone new and different from you. Easiest thing to do: sit with someone new at dinner. ... Have fun, this is supposed to be fun."

During the opening ceremony, students from each school poured some water from where they came from into a large jar, a symposium tradition signifying the unity of the Great Lakes.

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