

Urban students view farm life. Springfield Republican.
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SPRINGFIELD - For Jalam C. Suttles, a sixth-grader at the Alfred G. Zanetti Montessori Magnet School, spending two days and three nights on a working farm in Vermont was an extraordinary experience.

"We were just totally out of our element," said Jalam, one of 13 sixth-graders who slept in cabins, milked cows and fed chickens, many for the first time.

Jalam and Ju'an C. Williams, 11, said they heard twigs crack in the night, and wondered what made the sound.

Exposure to rustic life at a Farm & Wilderness Foundation camp in Plymouth, Vt., during the last week in September, "taught us more about the earth," said A'kala P. Chaires, 11. A'kala said the experience made her think about preserving natural resources.

The foundation runs multi-day camp programs for school groups, including environmental education, organic farming, team-building and leadership development, serving about 1,000 children a year from across new England.

Through a tag sale and other efforts, Zanetti students raised \$2,200 in recent months to pay for the sixth-grade adventure plus an upcoming trip by seventh- and eighth-graders to the Farm School in Athol this spring. Pride Stations & Stores, which operates 19 gas stations and convenience stores in Western Massachusetts, is Zanetti's business partner, and donated \$2,200 in matching funds.

"Recently, we've really kind of renewed our commitment to be a more active partner with Zanetti," said Karen B. Nystrom, advertising director for Pride, based on Cottage Street in Springfield.

Nystrom added that Pride President Robert L. Bolduc lets employees volunteer for read-aloud and mentoring programs at the Springfield schools on company time.

Zanetti principal Sandra Wyner Andrew said the trip to the Farm & Wilderness camp tied in to the school curriculum in ecology, biology, and social development.

"It's making your academics real, connecting your learning to the real world," she said.

At the camp, pupils got up at 5:30 a.m. each day to do chores, including feeding pigs and chickens, without complaint, said Zanetti teacher Kimberly A. Wojcik.

"It was about leadership, and working together," said Wojcik, who went on the trip with teachers Elyse S. Langer and Lindsay C. Franke.

Although pupil Sierra L. Davis, 11, had fun naming cows and pigs, she wasn't as enthusiastic about the food. "We ate ... tofu and vegetarian chili ... and a lot of salad," she said, making a face.

But Rosa M. Scavron, 11, liked hiking up a mountain. "We saw a lot of animal scat," she said. "(But) I learned how the woods is a nice place, and it's kind of quiet."



Sixth-graders from the Alfred G. Zanetti Montessori Magnet School in Springfield recently spent three days at Farm & Wilderness Foundation camp in Plymouth, Vt. Trying a ropes course is from left Jalam C. Suttles, 12, Julian R. Rivera, 11, and Rosa M. Scavron, 11, accompanied by a camp staff member.



Enrique D. Perez, 13 a sixth-grader; and teacher Elyse S. Langer from the Alfred G. Zanetti Montessori Magnet School in Springfield view a demonstration of cow-milking by a staff member at the Farm & Wilderness Foundation camp in Plymouth, Vt.