

Children's Learning Initiative receives John Ben Snow Foundation funding

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An Alfred University program aimed at helping area middle school students explore careers in science fields has received a prestigious John Ben Snow Memorial Trust grant for the second year in a row. In partnership with Andover Central School District, the Children's Learning Initiative (CLI) received a \$12,500 grant from the Trust, the Children's Learning Initiative at Alfred University will bring students from Andover Central School to the AU campus for a series of field days that will introduce them to careers in fields related to science, engineering and technology. Over the course of the next year, youngsters from the Andover school will spend four days on the AU campus, and AU faculty, students and other volunteers will also make two additional visits to the Andover school. The emphasis will be on hands-on learning in astronomy, biology, chemistry, engineering, environmental science, geology, and other science fields. "Our goals are to expose students in the middle school age group to science, engineering and technology, with the hopes that we will encourage them to pursue advanced study in those fields," said Dr. Michele Hluchy, professor of geology and environmental studies and author of the recently funded grant proposal. "Alfred University has some outstanding facilities and we want to share them with students in area schools," said Hluchy. "We have state-of-the art facilities for water analysis in our environmental science laboratories, our observatory has eight large telescopes, we have scanning electron microscopes, we have an entire lake for teaching about aquatic environments, and our labs house many other pieces of sophisticated instrumentation that most students would not typically have access to until they went to college. Through this program, though, we can make them available to area students in grades four-nine." "The reason for this program is simple, said Hluchy. "Studies have shown that by eighth grade, students are either 'turned on' or 'turned off' by science and math, which is why we are targeting our program to middle school students. We also hope that by exposing them to what goes on on our campus, many of them will consider pursuing their educations beyond high school." "There is a benefit to AU students as well, said Hluchy. "This program allows students in our education program some practical experience outside the traditional student teaching opportunities and it provides an opportunity for students from a wide range of academic departments and student organizations to interact with these children." AU students act as mentors and role models for the younger students. They will work with AU faculty and Andover Central School faculty and students on extracurricular field day events as well, including an environmental field day. The first year of its operation, the Children's Learning Initiative worked with students from Scio Central School, and last year, the first year for which it received John Ben Snow Memorial Trust support, the CLI worked with students from Whitesville Central School. Besides the partnership with the Andover Central School District specifically funded by the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust grant, the Children's Learning Initiative also organizes field days on the AU campus for area middle-school students on other topics including creative writing, the performing arts, Latino heritage and business. The field days are coordinated by a group of volunteer faculty, students, staff and administrators headed by Mark McFadden, director of AU's Career Development Center. The Independent College Fund of New York (ICFNY) administers the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust grant program for higher education. In notifying Alfred University of the grant, Joe Curtin, president of the ICFNY, wrote, "I am pleased to let you know that, once again, Alfred University has been selected to receive a John Ben Snow grant. Alfred has been one of the most successful applicants to their prestigious program, and your campus community deserves hearty congratulations."