



Science Center preparing To Reopen

Science Center preparing To Reopen

Published on 2/26/2007 in

New London — The DNA EpiCenter, after nearly closing at the end of last year, has secured new funding and is now rebuilding its staff and programs.

"It's been slow, but it's moving in the right direction," Abby Demars, the center's executive director, said Wednesday. "I'm excited about sharing the good news about keeping the DNA EpiCenter open."

The center, located on property of the Connecticut College Arboretum, offers hands-on science education programs for school groups. It also runs science-themed summer day camps.

Since going public with its financial problems late last year, the center has received new infusions of funding from local corporations and the state. The first donation, for \$25,000, came in January from a corporation that wants to remain unnamed. Dominion Resources, the owner of the Millstone nuclear power station, followed with a \$5,000 contribution, and a commitment for a \$50,000 grant came from the state. The funds, secured through the efforts of state Sen. Andrea Stillman, D-Waterford, and others, should be in hand within the next two weeks, Demars said.

The funds raised thus far have enabled the center to pay operating expenses and rehire staff, Demars said. Last week, two part-time science educators were hired to develop curriculum and teach programs. A part-time administrative assistant was also hired.

"We're working on new curriculum for third- through fifth-grade," said Demars. The programs will be to help teachers of those grades with science lessons and for groups of students brought to the center for field trips. The lessons will be based on the requirements of the science portion of the Connecticut Mastery Tests, which will be given in the state's public schools for the first time next year.

A grant from Pfizer Inc. is paying for development of the program for the elementary grades.

The funds raised thus far cover about 86 percent of what the center needs to operate until the end of the current fiscal year June 30, Demars said. The center hopes to raise additional funds through fees for the summer camps that are now being scheduled for July 9 to Aug. 24. Brochures for the camps will be printed and distributed in the coming weeks. Thus far the schedule includes camps called: "C.S.I. In Training," "Lego Engineering Camp," and "Technology Explosion." In response to parent feedback from previous years, Demars said, the prices of the camps will be lowered, hours will be longer and offerings more varied.

The center will resume programs for school groups in mid-March, and is currently contacting those that previously visited the center to invite them back. Programs for middle school groups that will be offered include "Mixtures and Murder?" about forensics; "Look Inside Your"Cell"ves," about plant and animal cells; and "What's in Your Genes?" That program focuses on DNA and genetics.

In addition to the new funding for this year, the center is also looking forward to new funding from the state for next year. State Rep. Betsy Ritter, D-Waterford, has introduced a bill currently pending in the state

legislature that would provide \$250,000 to the center in fiscal 2007-2008.

The center needs about \$650,000 for its total operating budget next year, Demars said, so it will need to raise funds from other sources to supplement the state monies. The center has also been working with the office of U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, to secure a federal education grant for fiscal 2008.

Last week the center held an open house for local legislators and members of its Board of Trustees to acquaint them with the center and its programs. The group was given a lesson in one of the center's labs.

www.dnaepicenter.org

New London
