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## Partnerships bring world of fishing to Wright students

MALTA - A group of fourth- and fifth-grade students had the chance to learn all about fishing as part of an after-school class at Wright Elementary School.

Offered as a four-week fishing clinic, the students learned about fish and their environment, ecology, ecosystems, fishing tackle, lures, rods and reels and how to use them.

Activities included casting lessons, how to tie strong fishing knots and what smoked salmon tastes like.

A lot of people worked together to make the fishing clinic successful.

The clinic was taught by Tom Haapoja, his wife, Lisa, and Ben Mommer.

Haapoja is the director of the Applied Business Research Center in the College of Business at Northern Illinois University, Lisa Haapoja teaches third grade at Wright and Mommer is a freshman at DeKalb High School.

While business is Haapoja's livelihood, fishing is his avocation. He is a lifelong fisherman who writes for Great Lakes Angler magazine and is a tournament winning angler.

Another important partner to the clinic was Shakespeare Fishing Tackle, which donated an Ugly Stik rod and reel combo, tackle, a tackle organizer, a soft-sided tackle box and hats for each student to keep.

There was no fee for students to take the class.

"It was extremely kind of the folks at Shakespeare to help out and make this possible," Dr. Haapoja said.

Shakespeare won the 2006 "Take Me Fishing" manufacturer-of-the-year award for its support youth fishing programs.

"Fishing is a legacy sport, meaning the knowledge of it is often handed down to children from parents or other family members. Some students have family to pass along this knowledge, but unfortunately, others do not. Also, fishing can have a positive impact for everyone. It is often people



Tom Haapoja with fishing students (front row) Tyree Burgess, Jordan Mingus, Brad Gustello and Cody Peterson, and (back row) Bryant Mommer, Sean Connors, Adam Weiss, Angel Villalobos, Ahmed Alhag, Ben Mommer (DeKalb High School) and Will Ferguson. Provided photo

who fish or hunt that see first-hand what human impact has on the environment, and they can help preserve it," Haapoja said. "Also, it's a great activity the whole family can do together."

Some people think fishing is boring. But that's usually because they can't catch fish.

They often just don't know about the many variables to consider when fishing.

Haapoja said there are a number of things that affect whether a fish will take a lure, such as changes in weather, a fish's diet or the time of year.

And how do you find the big fish worth catching?

In most bodies of water, 90 percent of the fish are in only 10 percent of the water. It takes a lot of critical thinking skills to be successful at fishing, and those skills are what students learned in the fishing clinic.

The instructors spent a lot of time teaching the students how to sort through all these variables.

Students learned how to tie knots and what lures to use and worked on puzzles related to fishing and talked about fishing.

They also got to share their stories of fishing and help each other with casting their new fishing rods.

Haapoja said, "I only hope the students take their newfound knowledge and enthusiasm they got from the fishing clinic and share it with others. The most important thing about fishing is to pass on what you've learned."

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