

The Newtown Bee

VS - 48 PAGES

NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT, FRIDAY, AUGUST 20, 2004

65 CENTS

NHS Uses \$2,500 Grant To Help The Environment, Catalog Species

By LARISSA LATWYN

This year, biology students at Newtown High School will not just be identifying different species. After cataloging the various flora and fauna in high-resolution detail, they will be creating their own field guides and working to help the environment.

Biology teacher Frank LaBanca was one of this year's approximately 1,200 recipients of a \$2,500 grant from the Best Buy Children's Foundation, designed to enhance technology in school curriculum.

Mr LaBanca used the grant to purchase a Canon SLR EOS digital camera with two memory disks carrying 512 and 256 megabytes of memory, a scanner, printer, and, in accordance with the high school's contract with Dell software, a Dell computer.

The Best Buy technology program has awarded approximately \$2.9 million to schools since its inception last October.

"I found out about the grant through a newsletter emailed to me last fall by Vernier, a science and technology company I've done work for," said Mr LaBanca. In order to qualify, the high school had to be located within 25 miles of a Best Buy store.

"There's a Best Buy in Orange that is just under 20 miles from here," said Mr LaBanca. "So we qualified. I then formed a proposal as to how I would use the grant to promote integrated technology."

Mr LaBanca's principal idea was to purchase a high-end camera for students to use to catalog different species in a project involving environmental analysis of Deep Brook and the Pootatuck River.

The analysis would be done through the Science Center of Connecticut's Project SEARCH program. The Science Center of Connecticut is the educational arm of the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Project Search helps Connecticut high school students learn about the environment through hands-on field projects.

"After the oil spill at Fairfield Hills [in December 2003] there was some runoff that may have gotten into Deep Brook and the Pootatuck," Mr LaBanca explained, "so the DEP has been using Project SEARCH to assist in analyzing just how substantially waters such as these may have been affected."

Mr LaBanca is planning two onsite trips to the two



The beach rose flower is usually pink or white and grows on coastal areas.



In mid to late summer, the roses produce a tiny fruit that can be ground into tea or jelly. —photo courtesy Frank LaBanca

locations with his fall and spring classes. "After the onsite visits, we will be doing months of analysis," said Mr LaBanca. "It's a very long process. In addition to assessing the water quality, we'll be using the camera to catalog the different species. Students can then use the information to make their own field guides."

Pictures can also be used in PowerPoint presentations.

Mr LaBanca said he was very pleased when he learned he was one of the grant recipients.

"It's a great opportunity for students to learn in a more direct, hands-on way," he said, "as well as to be really doing something that has meaning and a clear purpose."

Mr LaBanca made his purchases in time to introduce them to his classes before the end of the 2003-04 school year. The new equipment was used to aid students in learning about genetics.

This past summer, Mr LaBanca used the Canon to take pictures of beach roses, or *Rosa rugosa*, at the Edgartown Lighthouse on Martha's Vineyard.

"The beach rose grows predominantly in coastal areas," he said.

The rose's delicate bright red fruit, no larger than a human thumbnail, can be ground into tea or used to make a decadently sweet, plum-colored jelly.

"The camera is great," Mr LaBanca said, noting the detail of the leaves and fruit on an 8-by-10 glossy print-out. "It's a wonderful piece of equipment."

This year, Mr LaBanca plans to apply for the grant again.

"The only additional requirement this year is that all the merchandise must be purchased from a Best Buy," Mr LaBanca said, noting the company's "many high-end products."

Mr LaBanca is currently working on his EdD in biology instruction from Western Connecticut State University in Danbury.

He said the equipment he was able to acquire through the Best Buy program could be used in his dissertation on using integration technology in the classroom.

"I'm looking forward to the [school] year ahead," he said.

For more information on Project SEARCH, visit www.projectsearch.org.