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INTERNET EDITION

Boys & Girls Club kids dive into science program

By James O'Brien

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The Blue Hill Boys & Girls Club of Dorchester took its after-school science program to the source last March and this past summer.

Blue Hill Education Director Tanya Gould left for Mystic, Connecticut last March to train for Camp Hercules, an immersive program offered in coordination with oceanographer Dr. Robert Ballard, the Sea Research Foundation, Inc., the Immersion Project, Mystic Aquarium and the Institute for Exploration.

"We are one of 20 Boys & Girls Clubs nationally that participate in this program," Gould said by telephone Nov. 10. "It's basically designed to teach kids about biology. We are the only club so far in Massachusetts that's selected to participate. The camp selected two participants, a boy and a girl, ones who seemed most interested in each program."

Gould's preparatory visit in March included time with Ballard and previews of the activities Boys & Girls Club participants would experience over the summer. A Boys & Girls Club press release described the training.

"Ms. Gould attended a training workshop in Mystic," according to the release, "where she had the opportunity to meet Dr. Ballard and hear first hand about his exciting adventures to the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, as well as his multiple challenges exploring the sunken Titanic. He also shared information about his summer 2005 expedition to the hydrothermal vent system, located on the mid-Atlantic Ridge off the coast of Georgia."

"[Ballard] gave us information about what he's doing," Gould said. "We went down so we'd be trained first. We went through the missions ourselves. There are about 12 or 13 for each category."

Gould took 12-year-olds Malukah Young and Stephen Edmonds to Camp Hercules this summer, following her training. She said the kids were inspired and challenged by what they encountered in Mystic, but that they also had a good deal of fun.

Edmonds was enthusiastic, speaking about his trip by telephone Nov. 15.

"It was good, we did a lot of stuff," Edmonds said. "They told me to come up and I had to do the part with the vinegar and flour. We had to try to make it hot, then it cooled down and then it got hot again when we shook it."

Edmonds said it was important for young people to have the opportunity to participate in these kinds of programs.

"So they won't be on the streets," Edmonds said. "So they can learn more scientific things. I think there's more but I can't get it off the top of my head."

"Science might be kind of difficult, depending on how it's being taught," Gould said. "This program not only gives interesting activities for them to do, there's a career aspect to it. They talk about how people are needed to run a submarine and how to run a [crime scene investigation] kind of thing, investigating and excavation. It might help in gearing their thinking toward what does a marine biologist do? [Camp Hercules] kind of breaks it down for them."

"We went on a whole bunch of activities in the area," Gould continued. "We had a barbecue on the beach. We went on a schooner, fished on a boat with a net, different things like that."

"Even now," Gould said, "they said they did not want to leave. They had a lot of fun, which is the most important thing. It opens up and broadens their horizons. If you can combine hands-on learning that's fun, it doesn't have to necessarily feel like it's school."

Gould said that the program could pave the way for future success. At the very least, it expanded her participants' horizons.

"Number one, on a broad scale," Gould said of the advantages, "basically travel. I think that any time you create an experience that kids might not have the opportunity to do. Some kids might not be fortunate enough to travel. They're interacting with other kids which is a great experience."

She said that her experience with the program prompted some personal learning, as well.

"When we first went down and I got to meet all these people from different clubs," Gould said, "I never thought about what goes on below the ocean. It just sparks the imagination."

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