



Environmental Science Program Groups - 1970s and 1980s

The “Envi Sci” Program Turns 50 Next Year!

In 2017, the Environmental Science Program of Newton will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

That news has surprised some parents of students who recently enjoyed the program, and it has delighted former leaders and students, some going back to the 1970’s.

The “Envi Sci” Program has evolved with the times, but it still does many of the things that have made it successful year after year. The Program is planning several events for the summer of 2017 that will let “alums” of the Program get together and enjoy remembering what they liked most about their time in the Program.

If there is a way to explain what makes the Program so well-liked, it would be the things that make it unique compared to other programs for students.

First, the Program is not like many sports-and-swimming summer camps. It is different every day, and students can expect to go on a hike one day, to take a bicycle trip another, or to take a trip on the T to a special environmental destination. There is a “mountain sequence” that helps students develop the skills and endurance necessary for ambitious back-packing.

Second, a long-standing tradition is that the leaders run the Program. That is because the leaders meet regularly during the January through June months to plan and to develop the science workshops that they will teach in the field when the Program is running. The meetings give the group of leaders a chance to bond and to work on their leadership skills. During the operation of the Program in the summer, the leaders divide the students into small groups and take them out on the day trips, with a lot of individual attention.

Third, the Program takes the students and the leaders to climb Mt. Washington every year, which is an accomplishment that gives anyone a lot of pride. The Appalachian Mountain Club knows the Program from its 40+ years of staying at the Lakes of the Clouds hut on Mt. Washington, and the staff at the AMC hut welcomes our group every year.

The Program has been able to sustain this experience for students and leaders with the help from the Newton Conservators, which for many years has generously donated scholarship funds to support students from families who cannot afford the Program's tuition. In recent years, the Program has also received support from Green Newton (formerly Green Decade), and each year there are parents and other individuals who donate to help the Program succeed.

It is important to note that the Program is part of the Newton Conservation Commission and receives essential support from staff at the City of Newton to "keep the wheels turning" year after year.

The process of planning the 50th anniversary celebration has made it possible to connect with many people from the past decades, some of whom have enthusiastically told me stories of their time as students and leaders and have been happy to hear that the Program is still going strong. Some have generously sent donations to support the Program's operations or to fund education of the leaders.

A number of alums have repeatedly talked about how people in the Program made friends they have kept for life and how they learned a lot of interesting science, in one case, "more than I learned in school."

There are some things that the Program no longer does — we dispensed with the "phone tree" of sequenced family telephone numbers once used for relaying news to families about our expected arrival time from mountain hikes now

that almost everyone has a cell phone. We have had to come to terms with guidelines for social media use, and we use online outreach to connect with families more than we use conventional media.

But the Program still continues to do what it does best: allowing students and leaders to enjoy the wilderness and to learn about the science of the environment. Along the way, it helps build relationships that last a long time.

There have been dozens of leaders who have worked in the Program over the years, and hundreds of students, many of whom have who have gone on to careers in science. The Program hopes to have many of them be part of the celebration planned for next year.

The current plans for the anniversary celebration include a gathering in Newton, most likely during the first week in August of 2017, for a barbecue or dinner that will feature photos, videos, and story-telling. There are also plans for a trip for "A Night At the Hut!" for those who would like to return to the Lakes of the Clouds AMC hut for a night, scheduled for August 5th-6th. These plans are subject to change, but the Program hopes to have more detail available soon.

The Program has information about the plans for the 50th anniversary online at: www.newtonenvisci.org/50years/index.html which includes a link to the Facebook page for the Envi Sci 50th. We plan to post updates in the coming months.

If you or someone you know has been part of the Envi Sci Program and would like to participate in the 50th anniversary events, please contact the Program's Executive Director, David Backer, at contact@newtonenvisci.org for more information. ■

David Backer

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