

Environment Day Article

Nine years ago, I was traipsing across the farm fields of middle-of-no-where Iowa carrying up to 24 20-ounce glass vials, or thirty pounds, of water samples collected from the surrounding culverts and streams and driving miles of straight roads with no stop signs. I now find myself among the hills and valleys of still middle-of-no-where Pennsylvania, but due to a health condition I pay closer attention to job descriptions that require the ability to carry more than 25 pounds.

I currently spend my days typing on a keyboard, fluorescent light bulbs humming overhead breathing recycled indoor air. At the start of the 2016 Leadership Centre County (LCC) year, I reviewed the schedule noting the upcoming days: History Day, Government Day, Economy Day. Needless to say, I ticked off the days until Environment Day, when I could once again get out into nature. This year's Environment Day focus was "Water: From Rain to Drain and Back Again," to which it did not disappoint. As to be expected, it was perfectly dreary. The rain came and went with one solid downpour. During the day we visited Musser Gap, hiked the trail and received a quick show-and-tell of hardpan soil. Time to get your hands dirty! We then preceded to the State College Borough Water Authority for an overview of our extensive drinking water infrastructure system. At Millbrook Marsh we discovered the critical role of wetlands in the management of stormwater and we stood outside the Premier UEC Theatre 12 on top of a manmade equivalent. We finished the day with a tour of the University Area Joint Authority, a truly state-of-the-art waste water treatment system. Notwithstanding the potty humor from my classmates, the tour was most educational.

In Centre County, we set the stage for all that happens downstream. And according to Steve Lynch, Class of 2012, we have the unique situation where water is plentiful and all of the water we drink is derived from the rain droplets settle into our streams, sinkholes and aquifers.

At the end of the day, each of my classmates wanted to know what they personally could do to improve the environment, and unfortunately the great water system that makes up Centre County left many confused and confounded. Other topics like recycling and even climate change are easier to make a connection with personal behavior changes. Landfills are filling up, so we should recycle. If there is little fear of drought in Centre County, why should I conserve water?" asked my classmates.

In some ways the old public service announcement, "Turn off the water when you brush your teeth." felt deceptive to those who just found out that we have water rich environment with clean drinking water.

With my environmental background, I clearly heard a call to action. Being at the headwaters of the Susquehanna and the Chesapeake Bay, we must be cognizant of the impacts that we have downstream. We set the stage by our actions and must be good stewards. Harking back to Economy Day, we must be aware of the negative externalities caused by our actions. We do this by becoming more informed even if the information seems contradictory at first. Through programs like LCC we learn from our teachers as well as our peers. One thing my classmates learned from me is that the energy used to treat the drinking water we consume and the waste we expel has its own cost independent of how plentiful the resource. So, no matter if there is plenty of water in the tap, there is still a reason to take action.

Submitted by Courtney Hayden, Communications Coordinator for the Borough of State College and member of the Leadership Centre County Class of 2016. For more information about Leadership Centre County go to www.leadershipcentrecounty.org.