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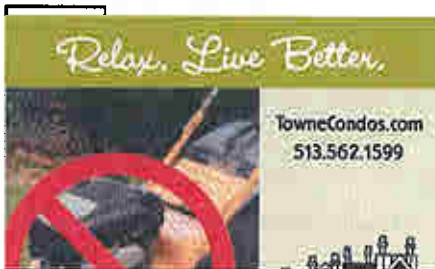
Biology teacher to watch over manatees

BY RICH SHIVENER | COMMUNITY PRESS STAFF WRITER

FOREST HILLS -- One biology teacher from Turpin High School is developing some of her lesson plans for this school year, but she wants to study manatees in Central America to finish them.

Starting Friday, July 14, Erin Walker will travel to Belize for 10 days as an educator participating in Earth Expeditions, a program established by the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden and Miami University's Project Dragonfly.

The program "promotes inquiry-driven approaches to learning and empowerment for teachers, teacher groups, entire schools and districts," according to its Web site.



The program's Belize field expedition course will take Walker to such locales as the Maya Forest and the Belize Zoo.

Some themes of the course include the re-introduction of harpy eagles, coral reef and marine ecology and manatee conservation.

Walker said she will focus more on the manatees by watching them from a sonar device or spending a few days on boats to help with the population count.

"It's all part of an ongoing effort to restore the manatee population in Belize," she said.

With the exception of studying biology at Xavier University, Walker said she hasn't been able to do a lot of field research.

"Field research is something I've always wanted to do more," she said. "Being able to go into a tropical rain forest is probably what drew me in right off the bat."

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Walker, who has taught at Turpin since 2001, plans to incorporate her Belizean experience in the classroom this school year.

She also wants to establish contacts with Belizean educators to link classrooms in both countries.

"This is certainly a whole another level for her," said Turpin Principal Peggy Johnson.

"The kind of students we have are definitely the kids who want to know what's happening in the world."

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