

THURSDAY  
September 3, 2009

# The Sentinel-Record

Published daily in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, since 1877

## Teacher draws on underwater studies

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The Sentinel-Record

Arkansas does not have manatees swimming in its lakes, but a local science teacher plans to draw on her summer experiences to teach students about some of the state's creatures.

Using her graduate school experiences from July 9-21 in Belize, and in collaboration with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Kathy Hopper, with Cutter Morning Star High School, wants to reconnect students with the interesting underwater creatures

found in The Natural State.

Hopper, a seventh- and eighth-grade integrated science and high school geology teacher, wanted to return to the environmental science background she developed during her years as an undergraduate student, and jumped at the opportunity to earn a master's degree and explore foreign environments through the online Global Field Program offered by Miami University in Ohio.

The three-year program brings master's degree candidates together in Africa, Asia and the Americas for firsthand experi-

ences with inquiry-driven education, environmental stewardship, and global understanding they can take back to their students.

Although she has a well-stocked aquarium in her classroom, Hopper said she realized after going to Belize that she's let environmental awareness slip from her lesson plans for too long.

"I have this great degree in environmental science, but I think I had gotten use to the daily grind of teaching school for the last 10 years and forgot about stressing

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conservation and the environment has much as I should have," she said.

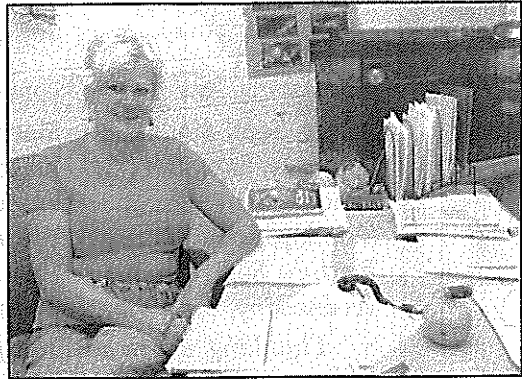
"Now that I'm going through this program and took this trip, I've realized how children back home know more about tropical fish than about the native species in their own state."

Hopper said the students she met in Belize were well-educated on their native land and water animals, and she wants students back home to be as knowledgeable about what roams Arkansas' lakes, rivers, and streams.

"I want to make students here more familiar with what's in Arkansas waters and how to conserve what we have," she said.

"The Master's degree program I'm in wants us to reach beyond our community with what we're learning, so I'm working with the Game and Fish Commission to build materials that teachers across the state can use in their classrooms to teach children about everything Arkansas' lakes have to offer and how to conserve what's there."

Hopper is in the beginning stages of creating materials for the Game and Fish Commission's Classroom Aquarium Program, which started in 1993 as a way to teach aquatic education to Arkansas children from kindergarten through high school using a 55-gallon aquarium that is supplied by the Commission through an application process and stocked with fish supplied by



The Sentinel-Record/Richard Rasmussen

**UNDER THE SEA:** Kathy Hopper, a science teacher at Cutter Morning Star High School, will use her graduate study work in Belize to help the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission develop educational material for its Classroom Aquarium Program.

the teachers.

Hopper approached Jimmy Barnett, Aquatic Resources Education Coordinator for the Game and Fish Commission, about building aquatic education lessons for teachers to use, and he said he wasn't about to pass up the opportunity to help teachers spread the word about what lies beneath the state's bodies of water.

"We're always looking for ways to boost our program, so this is a way to meet two people's goals and do the best we can to reach students with aquatic education because it's something kids aren't getting enough of," Barnett said.

"National research shows there's a disconnect with children and the outdoors, so this is a formal way to teach kids about the importance of water and the animals and plants that live in it and help strengthen children's connections with this part of their environment."

Hopper's mind is already overflowing with ideas, even though she won't start developing a timeline and discussing ways to update materials for the program until next week.

"I want to create a curriculum that will allow teachers to use their fish tanks as learning tools and maybe try and publish a manual that will help teachers broaden the scope of what they can do with the fish tanks," she said.

"There's really a lot of ways for teachers to get their stu-

dents learning about the native fish in Arkansas using these tanks, and I would like to see students be able to walk up to a fish tank and think of things to look at and compare on their own.

"Providing students with an education is the key to change and is what will help students develop a respect for their environment, which will hopefully make them more conservation-minded individuals as they grow older."