

# Delaware Envirothon provides real life science test for students

**MOLLY MURRAY**  
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Katie Fry, a senior at Hodgson Vo-Tech, competed in her last Delaware Envirothon Thursday and over the four years, there was always something new to learn.

"I'm a really competitive person," she said. "I feel like there are not a lot of academic competitions."

But Thursday was different. It was a chance for students with an interest in science and the environment to shine.

And the competition – as usual – was stiff. This year, Delaware's Envirothon drew 24 teams.

"That's a record," said Rick Mickowski, the event chair and longtime organizer.

This year, two Charter School of Wilmington teams, A and C took the top two places in the competition and Middletown High School earned third place.

Delaware high school students have competed in a statewide envirothon since 1996.

Mickowski said the general topics stay the same every year – with challenges in topics like forestry, wildlife and aquatics.

But there is a different theme every year. And this year's challenge was ideally suited to a former vegetable cannery in Milton. The property is now the Cannery Village subdivision and the teams saw first-hand, many of the same types of environmental issues you might see in a redeveloped, more urban setting.

For instance, when Ashley Pebbles, with the state forestry office, was setting up a skill test where students would measure a tall tree, there really weren't any on the grounds. So she used an old silo on the site and asked students to use the same techniques to figure out the height of the structure.

Mickowski said the program is popular with students because they can learn new skills and get outside, plus they can see how much they know compared to other teams in the state.

For many, he said, it solidifies a decision to go into a science or natural resources field or shows them the possibilities.

The special project this year was to present a plan to convert an aban-



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Senior Megan Glanz (from left), junior Evan Bennett and sophomores Aliyah Hannig and Sowmya Janaki of Delaware Military Academy team up at the Delaware Envirothon in Milton.

doned, 45-acre brownfield into a 300-home community.

Fry said the project is a challenge because the team has a limited amount of time to present its proposal to a team of judges.

That part of the competition "helps with time management, too," she said.

And it teaches teens to work together to solve problems.

Andrew Justice, for instance, wasn't sure about his choices in identifying a few soil samples.

"How long was your ribbon," Fry asked him.

"It wasn't long at all. It broke," Justice said, more certain that his answer was correct.

"We do it all as a group," said teammate Ophelia Christophi, a junior. "It helps."

Fry said "it also helps with problem solving. You have to use your context clues to figure it out."

Teams like the one from Hodgson start preparing for the competition when the school year begins.

Winners receive scholarships, gift cards and other prizes. The first-place team goes on to compete at the North American NCF-Envirothon this summer.



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Middletown High School sophomore Will Nylander uses a compass to complete the compass course at the Delaware Envirothon in Milton.

**The special project this year was to present a plan to convert an abandoned, 45-acre brownfield into a 300-home community.**

Reach Molly Murray at 463-3334 or [mmurray@delawareonline.com](mailto:mmurray@delawareonline.com). Follow her on Twitter @MollyMurraytnj.