

Impacting Our Kid's Lives; Impacting our Environment

- Chuck Dinkel

“Dear Members of Potomac Valley Fly Fishers, We wish to thank you for helping us bring Trout in the Classroom to *our* classroom. We worked hard to raise the money to implement TIC at Monocacy Middle School. Without your help, it wouldn't have happened this year. We want you to know that the money you provided for our system was well spent. We are excited to be learning about trout as we raise the eggs and are proud to be helping our environment. Sincerely, Mrs. Maruskin's 6th Grade Science Classes.”

This note, signed by approximately 100 sixth grade students, was handed to me in early January when I visited Monocacy Middle to deliver the trout eggs. It is a testament to the vision of PVFF members and our dedication to helping raise up a generation of environmentally aware and involved students.

When I first received a phone call from Mrs. Maruskin in early September inquiring about the possibility of participating in TIC for the 2007-2008 school year, in all honesty, I was not overly optimistic. The school had no money budgeted for the system which would cost about \$1000. I knew that PVFF had received a \$200 grant from the Mid-Atlantic Chapter (MAC) of Federation of Fly Fishers (FFF) and that we could offer that much assistance, but it fell far short of what was needed. Undaunted, Mrs. Maruskin's 6th grade science classes began a fund raising campaign that yielded \$450. One student brought in 25 cents for the equipment - all the money he had.

The school was still short of the target amount when providence intervened. A member's wife called and told me they had a 55 gallon fish tank they would donate. That alone was a savings of \$125. Next I heard from John Brognard that a conservation grant request that he and I had submitted to FFF headquarters for support of TIC schools would likely be approved. Trusting that the club would receive all or part of the grant and that our membership would support us, the Board voted to provide the balance of the money needed for Monocacy Middle School's TIC system.

When I called Mrs. Maruskin to give her the good news she was in class. Before I hung up I heard her tell her students. I knew from the yells and cheering in the background that we had made the right decision.

This is the second full year that PVFF has participated in Trout in the Classroom. For those unfamiliar with this program here's some background. TIC was the vision of a Trout Unlimited (TU) chapter in New York. The program was started a number of years ago with the goal of involving school children in the rearing of trout from eggs. As these students grow to care about their trout, they grow to care about the habitat in which trout

live. As the program progresses, students learn to see the connection between the trout, water resources, the environment, and themselves.

Right now four Frederick County Middle Schools (Windsor Knolls, New Market, Urbana, and Monocacy) participate. In just the past month PVFF board members have been approached by representatives of three additional schools that are interested in starting a TIC program next year.

There are a variety of ways in which TU Chapters and FFF clubs can support the program. As was the case with Monocacy Middle, PVFF was able to provide some financial assistance for purchase of a new system. For the past two years the club has helped the three other schools by purchasing the consumable supplies needed on an annual basis. PVFF's long term goal is to have all schools financially self sufficient.

Even more important is the technical support the club supplies. Several PVFF members serve as classroom guest speakers, provide guidance during field work such as trips to release the fish, and help with the set-up and maintenance of the systems. In addition, last year we met with students to teach aspects of fly tying and fly fishing and during the release of the fish into Carroll Creek we talked to them about aquatic entomology and PVFF's major stream restoration and tree planting project on the creek.

I don't know about you, but I get a real charge seeing these middle school students step-up and take responsibility for the rearing of the fish. On a daily basis they have to replace about two gallons of water in the tanks, monitor the water temperature, carefully test the water chemistry, and feed the fish. In some respects TIC brings the outdoors, indoors. The program is hands-on, something that most students get too little of today. I have worked with students who their teachers told me had little interest in school before TIC. It gave them a whole new passion for learning. This truly is an opportunity to impact our kids while also making an impact on the environment.