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MONDAY, MAY 2, 2011 / 9:24 AM

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## Darrin Fresh Water Institute Open its Doors to Undergraduates

By Anthony F. Hall

Thursday, January 20, 2011 

RPI's Darrin Fresh Water Institute has a global reputation for pathbreaking research on zebra mussels, acid rain, milfoil and water quality. But according to Chuck Boylen, the institute's associate director, its mission has always included education and a focus on building relationships with the community as well. The Fresh Water Institute's community outreach programs have encompassed not only a popular lecture series, but a willingness to test local residents' water and identify plants and animals that may or may not be invasives. And, of course, many of the institute's research projects have been undertaken to support efforts to protect Lake George's clarity and purity. And as of this fall, the Darrin Fresh Water Institute has the foundation for a strong and lasting education component.

RPI undergraduates can now spend a semester at the Fresh Water Institute, which is located in Bolton Landing, overlooking Lake George.

"We've wanted to offer undergraduates a Lake George experience ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lodge was converted to a year-round facility in 2003," said Sandra Nierzwicki-Bauer, the Darrin Fresh Water Institute's executive director.

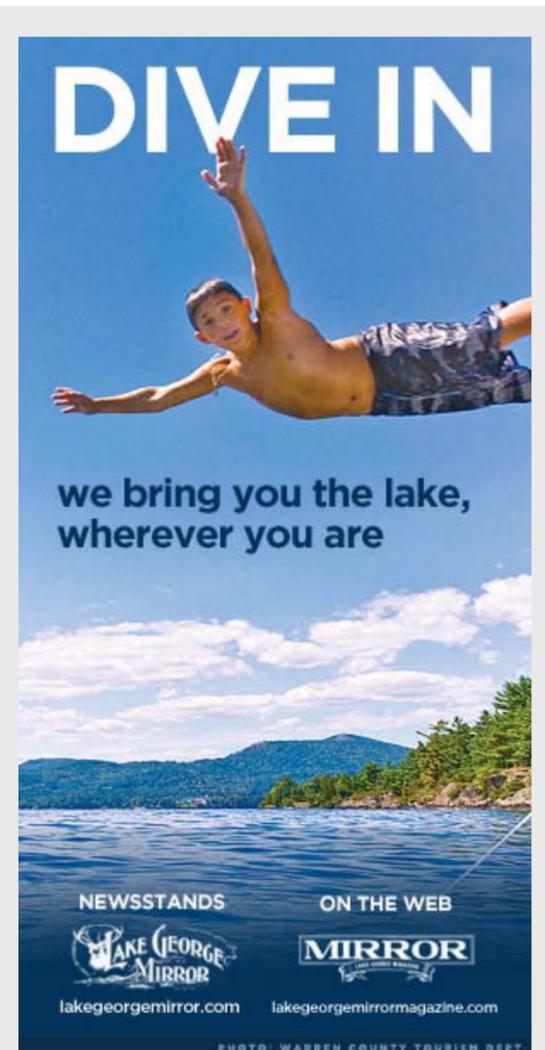
With the support of the Darrin family, that onetime summer cottage became a year-round education and research facility, with a state-of-the art computing center, space for lectures and films and rooms for visiting scientists and students.

While some of the undergraduates participating in the semester on Lake George are commuting to Bolton Landing from RPI's Troy campus, others are now occupying those rooms.

"We feel as though we've expanded the RPI campus to include Bolton Landing," said Nierzwicki-Bauer. And the students' reactions: "So far, it's been awesome," said Kelsey Cote, a senior from



Students test water samples from RPI on Lake George



of news coverage for Lake George and the Adirondacks

Nashua, New Hampshire. “Lake George is so beautiful. I can’t wait for fall and to see what Bolton Landing is like once all the tourists have gone.”

The rooms’ rustic décor is certainly a departure from that of the usual dorm rooms, said Nicole Nolan. “Mine is moose-themed,” she said. Bolton Landing is certainly quieter than Troy, but that contributed to the program’s appeal, said Megan Bramhall. “I grew up in a small town, and I like being out-of-doors,” she said.

As on any campus, the students spend a significant amount of time in the laboratories and classrooms.

But they also spend equal amounts of time on Lake George.

That’s one of the aspects of the program that attracted Kelsey Cote. “I had intended to be a cell biologist, but I realized that spending my life in a lab was not something I wanted to do,” she said.

Her experience at the Darrin Fresh Water Institute, where she was awarded an internship last summer to study Zebra mussels, has helped direct her toward a career in wildlife conservation, she said. As part of her course of study, Cote interns with the Lake George Association. Another student interns with another environmental organization, The Fund for Lake George, and another, Nicole Nolan, has an internship with the Department of Environmental Conservation’s fisheries expert in Warrensburg.

“The students do field work, work with graduate students on individual research projects, do lab work with sophisticated technology and get exposed to environmental conservation organizations,” said Nierzwicki-Bauer. “That’s what we offer. It’s a great opportunity for these students and they receive a full semester’s credit for their work.”

The program’s blend of theory and practice makes it an especially strong one, said Chuck Boylen. “Especially today, undergraduates don’t want just facts, they want to know how theory applies to real life,” said Boylen. “In our lab studies, we give them the tools they’ll need in the real world.” “We’re educating the next generation of environmental stewards,” said Nierzwicki-Bauer.

The program also includes a series of weekly seminars led by visiting scholars. Local residents interested in auditing the seminars, which are held every Monday morning, should contact the DFWI office at 644-3541.

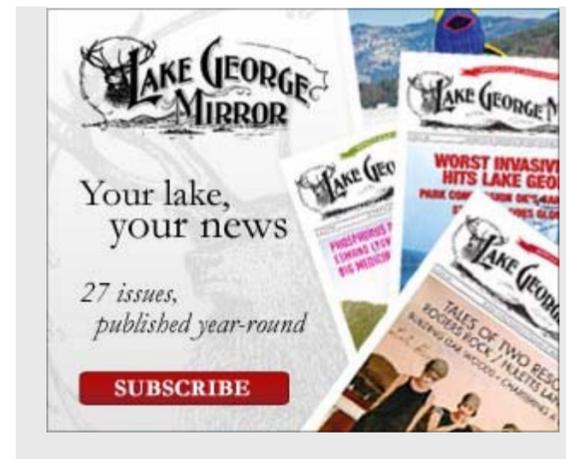
This year’s semester is essentially a pilot project for what Nierzwicki-Bauer and Boylen hope will become a multi-disciplinary program serving large numbers of students every year.

“Our students this year will become our ambassadors,” said Nierzwicki-Bauer. “Their enthusiasm will help it grow and make the Semester of Study an integral part of the Lake George Community.”

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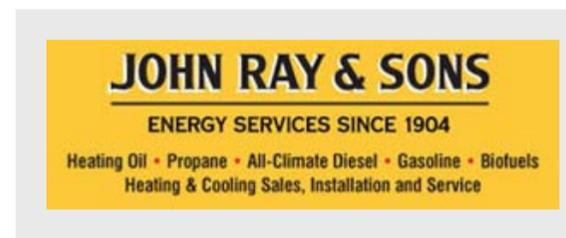
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