

Gone Fishing

Outdoor after-school class, repeated by popular demand



"Snow Angels" Ramona Mackenzie, aboriginal studies teacher, and an adventurous student take to the air during a winter camping trip.

Fishing is a skill forever linked with the "fishers of men"—Jesus' first disciples. That story takes on new meaning for Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) students, who are clamouring to participate in MANS's outdoor education fishing trips. Thanks to a grant from Alberta church member Ken Hubbard, MANS's after-school Outdoor Activities Club is in its second year, and students are pursuing—and receiving—more outdoor skill-building activities.

"The after-school outdoor club started again this year with ice fishing, snowshoeing, and other winter activities," explains high school vice-principal Michael Willing, who heads the program. Last year's ice fishing trip to Chain Lakes and Gull Lake was the first time casting a line for many students—not to mention drilling into ice to do it. As part of a four-credit course in fishing and wildlife last spring, nine junior high and high school students enrolled in a class that culminated in a three-day camping trip through the Canadian Rockies. There students tried their luck spy casting and fly fishing at scenic Abraham Lake, Blackstone River, and Goldeneye Lake. The students were, in a word, hooked.

So this fall the club headed to the mountainous Nordegg area, a venture so successful that students who hadn't previously been interested began campaigning for a second trip. They were successful: A second trip was scheduled for near the end of school for Grades 9 and 10.

Willing is certified by the Alberta Hunters Education Instructors Association, which allows him to give students a rounded education shaped through outdoor experience. He

finds that student interest is high in these programs because of their participatory nature. Students range in outdoor experience from enthusiasts to first-time campers, but all get instruction in outdoor skills and environmental education so that students learn best practices in wilderness camping.

Learning from God's "second book" provides many positive benefits not duplicated in the classroom. Students "are surrounded by tactile and physical beauty," which, Willing observes, is particularly important to them, and the social fun of camping together also breaks down barriers and brings students closer together as friends. Some high school students are also taking a hunter education course and plan to earn their certificates from the Province of Alberta. A spiritual perspective shapes all outdoors lessons as teachers impart what it means to be a good steward of the environment and show students how to rely on the Creator for what they need.

As the new high school building allows curriculum to expand, hopes are high that there may be even more fishing and wildlife adventures available as part of the program at MANS High School. Until then, MANS students will continue with the blend of after-school outdoor club and environmental classes that get them out in God's nature, with a better understanding of Jesus' invitation for us to become fishers of people. ■

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