

# Students, volunteers work together to rebuild salmon population in Credit River

By ERIN SUE  
For The Banner

Local environmentalists, Belfountain public school students and volunteers are working together to protect and build the population of Atlantic salmon in the Credit River.

The Belfountain Hatchery Project was created in 1998 by Jeffrey Collins, a successful entrepreneur and environmentalist, and Mark Heaton, a fish and wildlife biologist, both local residents.

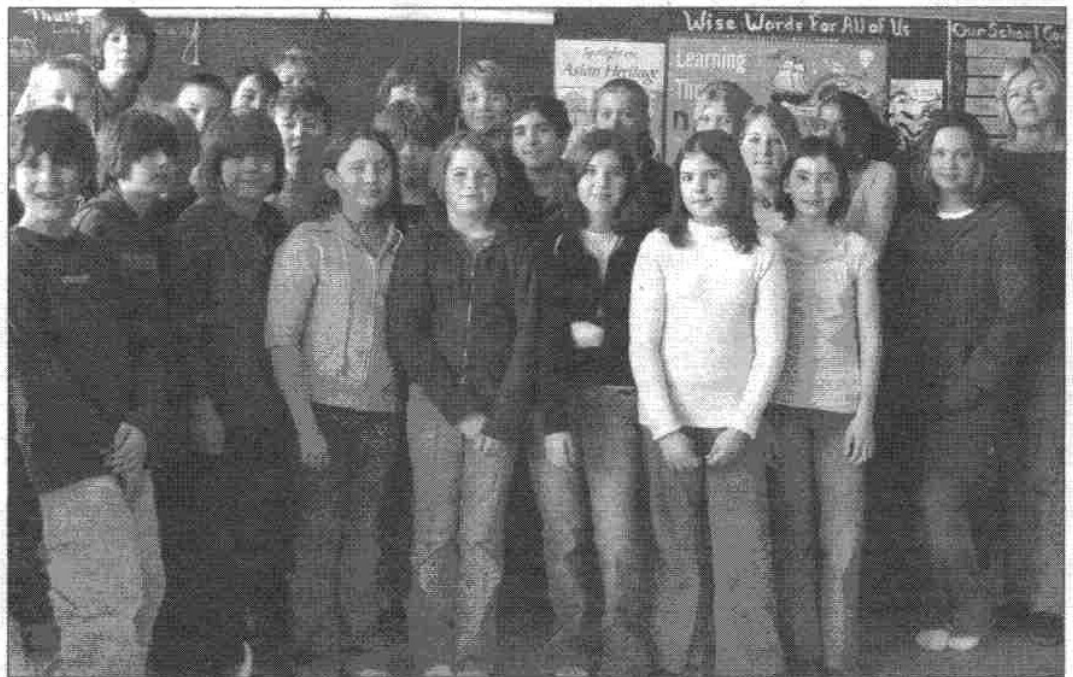
The Ontario government recently recognized Collins for his contribution to the community with this project. Collins, who has a large portion of the hatchery on his property, and volunteers much of his time on the project, says, "I think the volunteers really deserve this award, I just do a bunch of community service."

The government awarded six outstanding college graduates for their work in enhancing the province's economic prosperity and quality of life by their innovative ideas.

The goal of the hatchery is to reintroduce Atlantic salmon to the Credit River. The project also focuses on teaching children to be stewards of the environment in a program that runs at the Belfountain public school, along with other elementary schools throughout the Region of Peel.

The Credit River, along with many other North American habitats, has been experiencing a drop in the numbers of salmon, as the fish are sensitive to environmental changes.

The Belfountain Hatchery Project is working with the



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Students at Belfountain public school — including Pamela Gibson's Grade 6 class — have played a role in raising and releasing thousands of Atlantic salmon into the Credit River through the Belfountain Hatchery Project. Below, the classroom's tank, which houses 158 fish.

community to raise money for and awareness of the local Atlantic salmon population.

Collins explains that community donations fund the school projects.

The classes raise the fish from eggs, and introduce them to the Credit River at the end of the school year.

Collins says the model works well — since the students do not have to fundraise for the equipment, but can focus on caring for and learning about the fish.

Collins says that currently there are only three rivers in Ontario that have been designated as salmon rehabilitation rivers, and that the hatchery is

trying to expand its program. By doing this it will be able to raise more funds to give to more classrooms.

In Pamela Gibson's Grade 6 classroom at the Belfountain school is an aquarium that houses 158 eggs.

"It looks like an apartment building, a condominium actually," laughs Gibson. The aquarium features individual rooms which each house an egg attached to the wall. When the eggs hatch, they feed off the egg yolks, and are then hand fed after six weeks when they are approximately seven centimetres long.

The class works alongside fish and wildlife biologist, Mark Heaton of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

"He's on the warpath for fish," says Gibson of Heaton. "He's a good speaker, and good with the kids. The program teaches the kids to appreciate the environment and look after it as adults."

Each aquarium costs around \$1,000, and there are currently 10 schools in the Region of Peel that have one. The tanks are small, around 45 litres, with specially designed chillers to regulate the water's temperature to mimic the Credit River and to keep the

eggs alive.

Heaton agrees that the program is beneficial to the students, and says that the hatchery program is only successful because of the communities surrounding the Credit River.

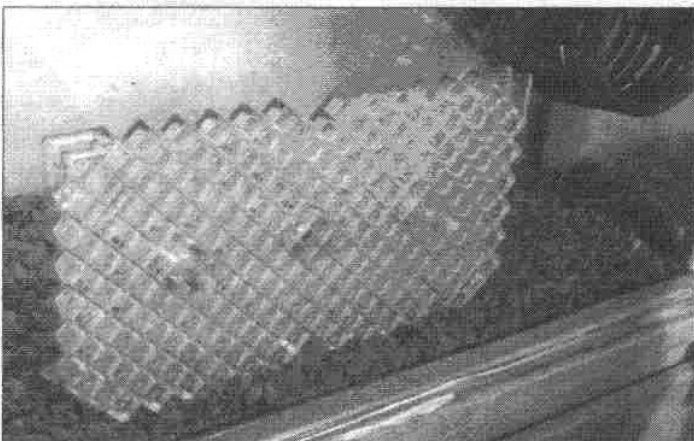
"If it wasn't for the volunteers we wouldn't have the eggs and the funding to make it happen," explained Heaton.

The program is still growing and working on getting students more involved with protecting the Credit River and its species. Heaton teaches the class about fish ecology and conducts in-class presentations to better help them understand the importance of the program and the river.

"When you talk to the kids at the end of the year, you go in, and they know a lot about salmon. They learn a lot from this experience, and it's something that they can get their heads around," says Collins.

He also says that many of these students, when they reach high school, come back to do their community service hours with the hatchery program.

Last year the Belfountain Grade 6 class introduced 3,000 salmon to the Credit River and plans to continue to participate in the hatchery project.



Struck by car, pedestrian sustains minor injuries