



News Photo by Emily Siegmon

Chris Witulski, interim executive director/education director at Besser Museum, works with Lincoln Elementary School fourth-graders on mapping fossils. From right to left, Joseph McDonald, Zoe Mantas, Sam Thompson, Makenna Lindros, Ian Mindykowski, and Madison Walmsley.

Nearing finish line to 2-year fossil project

By EMILY SIEGMON

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ALPENA — Fourth grade Lincoln Elementary students in Kellie Poli's class are close to finishing a two-year fossil park project while partnering with the Besser Museum.

"Over the last two years we have traveled and searched for fossils, cleaned, sorted and identified them. Now, we are at the end of our project and focusing on finishing our interpretive signage that will be displayed at the museum," Poli said.

Poli and her fourth grade class and volunteers from the museum and community are now at the final stage of the project and using scientific knowledge and research they have learned to create a permanent display at the museum.

"They are working hard creating interpretative signage so that anyone that comes to the museum can enjoy and understand fossils. We had a lot of volunteers that have helped with our project from the museum and community. A lot of volunteers were former teachers, geologists, and members from the NOAA," Poli said.

In order to get involved

with the two-year project and partnership with the museum, funding came from the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative grant, which was written to allow the students to get involved with the fossil park.

During the final stages of the class project, students were split into two groups to work on mapping and identifying fossils.

"This way someone who visits the area will know where the best places are to find fossils," Poli said.

Ten-year-old Graham Sayre said the project has been fun, and he is looking forward to seeing their work displayed at the museum.

"We learned a lot about fossils in Michigan. We learned how old they are and where they were found. My favorite part about our project is making signs that will show people how hard we have worked," Sayre said.

Bradley Thompson, 10, said he has enjoyed the project for the last two years.

"I'm really happy to have our names on the signs that we're making. They'll show fossil identifications, the Devonian period, and where you can find fossils," he said.

According to Thompson, the most challenging aspect

of the project was fossil identification and finding the actual fossils.

"It was extremely fun to go fossil hunting with my friends, though, we went to Lafarge, Besser Museum, and to Rogers City to find them," he said.

According to Poli, the class and volunteers were able to collect thousands of fossils from the different locations and found that each area specialized in different ones. The class was also able to share their found fossils with the rest of the school and parents during a math science family fun night, and let students take some home.

"This really turned out to be a fantastic opportunity for these kids. Most fourth-graders don't get a chance to go fossil hunting, but they got the chance," Poli said.

Chris Witulski, interim executive director/education director at the Besser Museum, worked close with Poli on the project, and said she wanted to work with school children on a hands-on dig.

"I called Lafarge, and they were willing to partner with us and allow a fossil dig. I found that a lot of people in Alpena are inter-

ested in rocks and fossils, so it was easy to find volunteers and businesses to support what we wanted to do," Witulski said.

Although Witulski admits the project took a lot of hard work, she said it was community support that made their goals possible.

"The students will have a permanent exhibit with interpretative signs up at the museum. Their goal was to help out with the exhibit and create educational signage for part of the permanent exhibit, and it's almost finished," Witulski said. "This project was so successful, we would love to partner with Alpena Public Schools in the future."

GLSI Representative Daniel Moffatt said schools can apply for the \$6,000 grant through GLSI for projects by visiting nemiglsi.org and writing proposals.

"I've been working alongside Besser Museum to support the ongoing project. Right now it's crunch time, we're designing the signs and getting them printed. When the signs are put up, come and check them out," Moffatt said.

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