Badge of honor

Katie Karadjoff of Brownie Troop 1612 from Our Lady of Sorrows School in Farmington, was the only Brownie to earn a badge by climbing to the top of the wall and ringing the bell at Galyan's in Novi last month.

County to combat West Nile early

BY SUSAN B. TAUBER
STAFF WRITER

When it comes to the West Nile virus, prevention is better than cure.

That's what Gary Frick of the Oakland County Health Department said in his talk to residents about preventing the spread of the disease.

West Nile virus exploded almost without warning last spring and summer. Birds, particularly crows, were discovered to be infected with it. Many people became ill; some even died. It was tracked to almost all counties in Michigan.

The virus causes encephalitis, or swelling of the brain and is carried by mosquitoes that infect humans, horses and birds.

The key to prevention, according to Frick, is to prevent the mosquitoes' larvae from hatching.

'This means reducing the mosquitoes' breeding sites," said Frick.

And everyone can help.

Frick suggested people call their city hall or township if they know of breeding sites. These include places where there is stagnant water, such as drains, ditches and culverts filled with trash and weeds.

People can prevent breeding sites at their own homes or places of business by eliminating the collection of water in gutters, toys, leaf piles, car tires used as planters or swings, wading and swimming pools, hollow stumps, bird baths and plant pots, trash cans, ruts and other water-holding places.

One of the county's advertising campaigns for the prevention of West Nile goes like this: "Standing water left alone/Keeps mosquitoes close to home."

Another slogan is "Remember the Three R's: Reduce (areas where mosquitoes breed), Repel (through the use of protective clothing and appropriate spray; Report (mosquito-breeding areas to proper personnel).

Frick said the best method of getting rid of the larvae is through the use of larvicides. These can be in the shape of doughnuts. Placed in stagnant water, where the mosquitoes might breed, they kill the mosquito larvae.

The county also will be setting mosquito traps. These traps attract mosquitoes to them. Then fans suck the mosquitoes up like a vacuum.

Not all mosquitoes cause West Nile. The main type is called the Culex mosquito.

Despite the bad weather this week, about 14 people braved the roads to attend the public forum on West Nile sponsored by West Bloomfield Township.

Anne Vaara, the township's environmental management planner, said a display on West Nile and how to prevent it is set up in the township hall.

"It provides information on the township's action plan and information on what Oakland County is doing," she said.

It also includes information on how people can avoid being bitten by mosquitoes that could be carrying the virus. One of the ways is by wearing long sleeves and long pants at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are out in force.

Another precaution is for adults to use insect repellent containing no more than 35 percent DEET. For children ages 2-6, there should be no more than 10 percent DEET in the repellent and none should be used on children 2 years old and younger. Young children aren't at risk for West Nile. The people most at risk are those 50 years and older.

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Falcon golf outing benefits FHS

Farmington High School's Falcon Society will host its third annual Falcon Open Golf Outing Saturday, May 17 at Cattails Golf Club in South Lyon. The outing begins with check-in at noon. At that time, the driving range will be open and the putting contest will begin. The shot gun start is at 1:30 p.m. Registrations are now being accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Included in the $100 donation is lunch, 18 holes of golf with cart, the driving range, a special gift bag, contests and dinner. Dinner only is available for a $50 donation.

Golfers can register as a four-person team or a two-some. Checks should be made payable to Farmington High School and sent to 33926 Oakland Street, Farmington, MI 48335: Attn: Chairman Herb Smith. Hole sponsorships are also available and tax deductible by calling Denise Albrecht at (248) 478-3218. Proceeds from the Falcon Open will benefit a variety of improvements inside and outside Farmington High School. For more information, call Chairman Herb Smith at (248) 478-3915 or Mike Tokar at (248) 866-5292. Registration brochures are available in the Farmington High School front office.

Try an alternative fertilizer this year

BY KURT KUBAN
STAFF WRITER

With the advent of spring, many homeowners will soon be turning their attention to the season-long quest to obtain a healthy lawn.

And for many people, obtaining such a lawn means using fertilizer. Unfortunately, the fertilizers most people use are a lot less healthy for local waterways than they are for Kentucky blue grass.

Many popular fertilizers are loaded with phosphorus and nitrogen, which make their way into lakes and rivers during rain events, causing algae blooms and an explosion of aquatic plants that consume the oxygen needed by fish and other organisms.

However, there are a growing number of alternative fertilizer products on the market that have low phosphorus levels and slow-release nitrogen, which have little impact on waterways.

As part of the Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority's healthy lawn and garden program, many local retailers have marked these alternative fertilizers with bright neon green "Slow-Release Fertilizer" stickers.

According to Lillian Dean, who coordinates SOCWA's healthy lawn and garden program, more than 30 hardware and lawn care stores in Oakland County are now participating in the sticker program. She said the program has expanded this year to include many chain retailers, including Dammnn Hardware, Aco Hardware, English Gardens, and Franks Nursery and Crafts.

"This is really a win-win for everyone. It's a win for the customer, who wants a choice. It's a win for the retailer, because they know some of the products they sell have an impact on the river. And it's definitely a win for the river," Dean said.

The river Dean refers to is the Rouge River, which has been severely impacted by urbanization and the associated polluted run-off.

Joe Rathbun is the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's environmental specialist for the Rouge River watershed, which includes much of Oakland and Wayne counties. He said as much as 60 percent of the phosphorus that makes its way into the Rouge and its tributaries is due to lawn fertilizers.

"The concentrations in most of the watershed are twice as high as they should be," he said.

"The results can really be seen in some of the impoundments, especially in the lower half of the watershed, where algae blooms are a big problem and larger aquatic plants thrive where they shouldn't. And of course, the river drains to the Great Lakes. Putting more phosphorus in Lake Erie is never a good thing."

According to Rathbun, homeowners should avoid fertilizers with phosphorus, because area soils are naturally saturated with phosphorus.

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