Cleanup crew

College students help tidy up Dunkirk beach

By GREG FOX
OBSERVER Staff Writer

You may notice Point Gratiot Beach in Dunkirk is a little bit cleaner now.
That is because SUNY Fredonia students took the reins of recycling into their own hands Sunday for the conclusion of the college’s seventh annual Earth Week celebration, a time dedicated to promoting environmental stewardship.

Nearly 75 volunteers showed up at Point Gratiot, where they collected 369.4 pounds worth of man-made garbage — everything from straws and stirrers to food wrappers and balloons.

"Across the Great Lakes, the kinds of garbage we typically find are single-use plastics, cigarette butts, cigar filters, plastic bags, bottles, cans, a lot of single-use items," Alliance for the Great Lakes New York Outreach Coordinator Nate Drag said. "I've been working with Fredonia the past few years, and it's usually one of the

Top: From left, SUNY Fredonia junior/History major Ben Schrantz, first-semester senior/Visual Arts and New Media major Lilyanna Landon and senior/Communications major Brian Julian pose with a large, wooden beam they found during a cleanup at Point Gratiot Beach Sunday, as part of the college’s Earth Week celebration.
Above: Sophomore Jeremy Martin (left) and junior Brad Martynowicz sort garbage they found during the cleanup.
biggest-sized groups every year."

English professor Christina Jarvis, coordinator of the cleanup the past six years, added she believes the students feel good about the work they accomplish, which is one reason why they come back to help year after year.

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"We see people from all across the majors, not just Earth Science, participate in the cleanup," she said. "Events like these inspire students to take action and translate what they're learning in the classroom into their everyday lives, and they realize a simple, individual act can make a big difference when they work collectively."

Freshman and Theatre major Sammie Nickel participated in the cleanup because she said it is important to keep beaches and the Great Lakes tidy. "I'm surprised how much styrofoam and other tiny plastics are here," she said. "There's just so much little stuff; it adds up, and you don't want this stuff out here. I now see how important it is to do this, and I'm grateful for people who help out."

Senior and Communications major Brian Julian agreed, calling the event a "nice opportunity to give back to the community."

"It's nice to give back to the environment, and Earth Week is a great time to do that," he said.

As part of the event, biology professor Michelle Kuns guided several citizen scientists to help monitor the beach's "health" by taking water quality readings.

"The data gathered helps put trash data into context and get a bigger picture of the impact," Drag said, adding that data includes bacteria content and weather impact, among other factors.

The following totals were significant items in the cleanup's final report: 2,352 foam pieces (less than 2.5 centimeters); 2,337 plastic pieces (less than 2.5 cm); 166 straws/stirrers; 46 tampon applicators; 116 plastic beverage bottles; 76 food wrappers; 60 balloons; 112 cigar tips; 26 construction materials; and 277 plastic bottle caps.

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