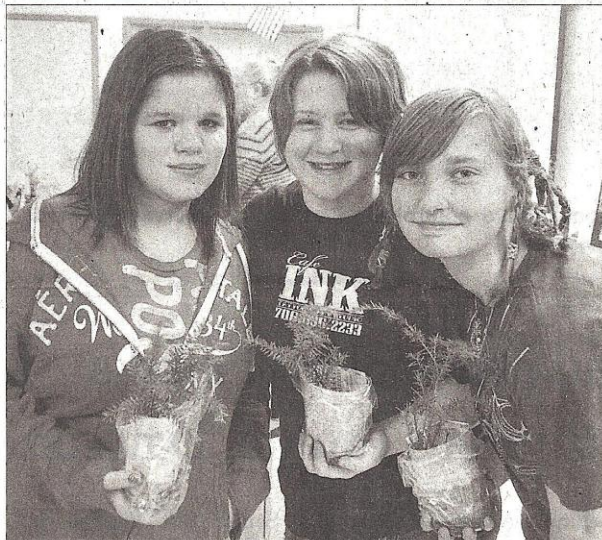
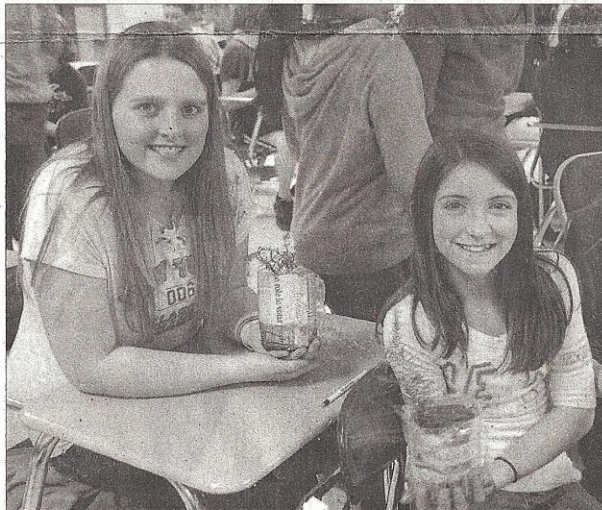


Educational

GMS students join effort to save hemlock trees

by Whitney Crouch

wcrouch@timescourier.com



ment of rare and endangered shade-loving plants, removing a vital source of stabilization for waterways and damaging the beautiful scenery of the region.

Shearer explained that the rampant adelgid infestation presents a serious ecological threat to local hemlocks, and it is important for individuals — even children — to take an active role in protecting these beautiful trees.

“I hope you will step up and be good stewards of the environment,” she encouraged the students. “The future is in your hands. You can make a difference. We want [the hemlocks] to be there when you grow up.”

Throughout Shearer’s presentation, the students offered good, knowledgeable answers and expressed an interest in the topic and how they can spread the word about this important issue and how property owners can protect their own hemlock trees.

After constructing biodegradable pots out of newspaper, each student received a small, hemlock sapling to take home. These trees have been treated and will be protected from the adelgids for one year.

For more information about the hemlock wooly adelgids and what you can do to address this problem, contact a Save Georgia’s Hemlocks volunteer by calling the Hemlock Help Line at 706-429-8010.

Donna Shearer, a volunteer representing the non-profit organization Save Georgia’s Hemlocks, visited with students at Gilmer Middle School Friday, March 25.

Using a PowerPoint presentation and an interactive game, she led three groups of students through a discussion of ecosystems, interdependency and biodiversity. They also examined the chain reaction that starts when the environmental balance is thrown off by something like an invasive species.

In particular, they studied the effects of the hemlock wooly adelgid, a sap sucking, aphid-like insect, which is threatening the stately hemlock tree population of the eastern United States. Native to Asia, these pests were accidentally introduced to Virginia in the 1950s and ever since have been killing trees all along the Appalachian corridor from Maine to Georgia.

Since a single insect can multiply into 90,000 in one year, a tree can be quickly overwhelmed by the bugs and will certainly die if not treated. If left unchecked, this pest will completely devastate the hemlock population, thus robbing animals of food and shelter, destroying the environ-

Photos by Whitney Crouch

At top, Save Georgia’s Hemlocks volunteer Donna Shearer assists a student by watering his new hemlock sapling, while other students hold the biodegradable pots they made out of newspapers.