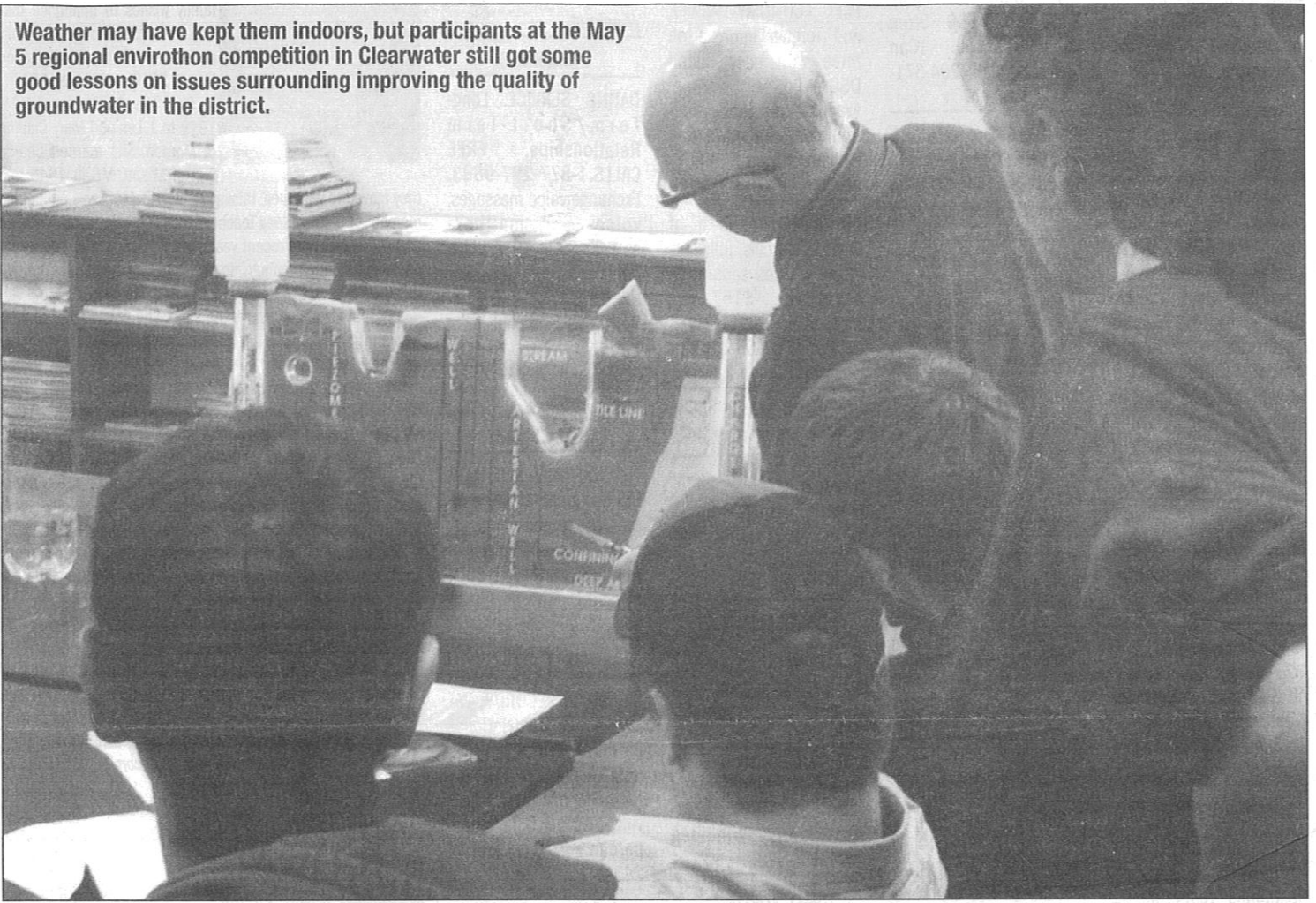


Weather may have kept them indoors, but participants at the May 5 regional envirothon competition in Clearwater still got some good lessons on issues surrounding improving the quality of groundwater in the district.



Envirothon puts students to the test

The organizing committee had been working for most of a year, trainers and specialists had been invited from across the province, the trail test had been prepared for the valley north of Clearwater.

And then three days and just under three inches of rain tested the endurance of everyone involved in the Envirothon.

You could tell the level of commitment by the fact that, in spite of snow and rain on the journey down, no one turned back. But there were some compromises made to Manitoba's climate in Clearwater for the May 5 event.

The trail in the valley had to be abandoned in favour of test sites near or within buildings and shelters around the Harvest Moon site and community hall, and a crew of test writers re-wrote whole sections of the trail test to suit.

The teams were introduced to the concept of the trail test, and each of the teams' specialists was trained on use of the tech-

nology associated with forestry, soils, aquatics, wildlife and ground water management.

After the training session, Larry Danielson and Nic Pharoah from the Arocha Centre at Pembina Valley Provincial Park made a presentation on good public speaking techniques.

They emphasized a series of ideas with the acronym SSSS Eye Ear Brain - which meant keep a relaxed stance, stand tall, speak clearly and know your spot - and you have to engage your audience's eyes, their ears and their brains.

In preparation for the day, each team had been given the same scenario and asked to make a ten minute presentation on how they, if they were a delegation to a community council, would improve the quality of groundwater in the district. They had also been asked to create a poster to support their presentation.

The teams were given a half hour to brush up their presen-

tations. Across the room, you would hear discussions about watersheds, flow speed, percolation of water through soil, arsenic poisoning, does it usually leech out of the slopes of the valley and how do I relate forestry with groundwater quality?

Teams, each guided by a volunteer coach spread out across Clearwater to the different sites. They interpreted signs at local historical sites, identified birds, pawprints, fish, flowers and furs, calculated the height of trees, analyzed the level of carbonates in soil pits in the yard and then presented their 10 minute speeches in front of a panel of judges.

Since some of these teams were new to Envirothon, and some were preparing for the provincial competition to be held at the end of May in Brandon, the emphasis of the day was on learning. The formal results will be tabulated over the next week and teams will be given their results.

On site, the winning teams of the day were in such categories as most efficient use of time, the youngest team registered, the most positive and supportive of their team mates.

One comment, made by a volunteer team coach summarized the goals of the event: the older members of the team worked hard to encourage the younger members to try and answer some very difficult questions. They showed their respect for the younger team members by accepting their answers and including them, even when, on occasion, experience would have shown another answer to be the better one.

The core of this program is in the concept of building team work and community, respect and mutual support.

Given the weather and the need to rethink the whole event on their feet, the sense of pride - among both the teams and the organizers - at the end of the day was well deserved.