

Hunters Of Microbes And Chemicals Zero In On Musconetcong

By J.J. DRAUTMAN

LEBANON TWP. — Data on water quality will soon begin flowing from a new analytical laboratory in the Municipal Building, Woodglen.

"We're sort of proud of this," said Samuel Faust. "We're the only township in the state with a water quality laboratory. We worked all last weekend to get it in shape."

Faust, Chairman of the Township's Environmental Commission, was instrumental in obtaining a \$20,000 federal grant to equip and operate the laboratory. The funds were made available through the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Professor of Environmental Science at Cook College, Faust first interested the Township Committee in the project, then led efforts to obtain the contract under which the facility will operate. Faust says that there are several similar contracts in the the state, under the 208 Water Quality Planning Program, but that Lebanon is the only township which received one.

"We were supposed to be in operation last summer, but the bureaucracy in Trenton took all summer to sign the contract," Faust says.

Although the state contract had not been signed, Faust conducted tests last summer under the auspices of the Township Committee. The Musconetcong River was tested for bacteria, nitrates and phosphates as it entered the Township above Penwell, and as it left at the Route 31 bridge outside of Hampton.

More Leave Than Enter

Summarizing the results of those tests, Faust said: "I'm sorry to say there are a lot more bacteria leaving than there are entering. There is pretty substantial pollution."

Faust has planned a program, funded by the Township, to seek the sources of that pollution this summer.

The new laboratory is equipped to conduct chemical and bacteriological analyses. Tests can be made for some organic chemicals, as well as for phosphates and nitrates — components of detergents. There is no equipment to analyze for pesticides. Tests can be carried out for three kinds of bacteria: coliform, fecal coliform and fecal streptococci.

The equipment is not what one would expect to find in a rural municipal building. There are drying and incubating ovens, a visible spectrophotometer, analytical balances, and a Kjeldahl apparatus for nitrogen determinations. Instrumentation is available which can measure dissolved oxygen and determine a water sample's biological oxygen demand.

Samples will be collected every 30 minutes during heavy rain storms. In addition to collecting the samples, flow rate in the stream and rainfall will be measured.

Five teams of volunteers will go out in the "heavy storms" to collect samples. The collecting teams are made up primarily of boys and girls belonging to local Future Farmers of America chapters. They will be supervised by Frank Leary, Chairman of the Pohatcong

Environmental Commission.

When the samples reach the Municipal Building, they will be analyzed by three area college students working under Faust's supervision. "I'm pleased that they are all Rutgers students," Faust noted. Charles Schmelzer, Lebanon Township, and Raymond Merrell, Raritan Township, both attend Cook College. Harvey Finkel, Lebanon Township, is a biology major at Livingston College.

Under the state contract, the laboratory will check water quality in five tributaries flowing into the Musconetcong. "We will see what is flushed out during a heavy storm," Faust laughs.

The five streams selected represent differing drainage situations. One flows through a forested area. Another receives run off from a residential region, a third from agricultural lands, and one flows through the center of Hackettstown.

In addition to the work required under the contract which equipped the laboratory, Faust plans to attempt to pinpoint pollution sources into both the Musconetcong and the South Branch.

Although the Township's laboratory does not have equipment to test for heavy metals, Faust says he can check for pollutants such as lead, cadmium, nickel, and mercury at Rutgers.

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