

Adopt the Suzhou Creek

Empowering the youth of Shanghai

The Maryland Center and the Shanghai Popular Science Education Commission are collaborating to tackle a long-standing environmental problem in Shanghai: the pollution in the Suzhou Creek. Together, they are launching a program called Adopt the Suzhou Creek.

For decades, unregulated industrial development poured untreated waste directly into the Suzhou Creek. The indigenous plant life and fish died as a result of the pollution; the unchecked dumping of industrial waste decimated the Suzhou Creek's ecosystem. The situation became so severe that the water gradually turned black, an acrid smell became synonymous with the Suzhou Creek.

By the mid-1980s, the Suzhou Creek ranked as one of the world's most heavily polluted bodies of water found in an urban area. For those with no choice but to live in this section of Shanghai, for whom relocation was not an option, life near the Suzhou Creek became synonymous with imprisonment.

This situation is beginning to change under the auspices of the Shanghai Municipal Government, through the Suzhou Creek Rehabilitation Project, which began in 1997. Adopt the Suzhou Creek will support the government's activity, giving it a much-needed boost by raising public awareness about the severity of the problem. Adopt the Suzhou Creek aims to bring both community and corporate involvement into play in rectifying the situation.

The 9-month program, to be jointly initiated by the Shanghai Popular Science



Education Commission and the Maryland Center China, will begin in April of 2003. There will be 300 student participants in the program, selected from 30 Shanghai high schools, including the Shanghai American School and the Roots and Shoots Institute.

Modeled after the innovative Education Initiative of the Chesapeake Bay Program in Maryland, Adopt the Suzhou Creek "will introduce the people of Shanghai to the widely accepted concept from the US of citizen ownership of the living environment, through participation and education of international and local high school students," says Ning Shao, Director of the State of Maryland China Office.

The program will challenge students to become personally involved in the care of the Suzhou Creek. Each student team will "adopt" a section of the creek, to observe aquatic life in the water. They will test and analyze the water of different sections of the creek using advanced testing kits, in order to identify what influences are impacting water quality. Each team's project will culminate in a

final essay competition, based upon the data they collect.

Funding for the program will come from a combination of corporate sponsorship and support from the Shanghai Municipal Government. Corporate and personal donations will be needed to realize the vision of Adopt the Suzhou Creek.

Adopt the Suzhou Creek will have lasting value to both the community and its corporate sponsors. Awareness will be raised through this project, and efforts will be made towards making a positive and lasting change in the mounting environmental problems that Shanghai faces. The tangible benefits of this program to the community are numerous, as well as the value the experience will give to Shanghai's brightest high school students.

"This project is really an empowering process for the people of the city," adds Shao. "Especially for the children who must live with these problems from the past generations, and who will be inheriting this city in the future. That's the power of this concept."

Adopt the Suzhou Creek presents sponsors with a unique PR opportunity, allowing them to improve their corporate image by showcasing their concern for both the environment and the quality of life for the people of Shanghai. ■

For more information about how your organization can become involved with Adopt the Suzhou Creek, please contact: Yvonne Cai at Maryland Center China at 62797657, Fax:62797636, or Email: yvonnecai@mccusa.org