

Students plan greener planet

York Region students shine in program that sees teams come up with innovative environmental products

BY MITCHELL BROWN
Staff Writer

Huggies for heifers, anyone?

The "bovine nutrient management apparatus" — basically a nylon harness and bag attached to Bessie's business end — is just one of the new products high-school students participating in the Shad Valley program came up with this year.

"A cow, I think, releases feces and urine 165 times a day," said Amanda Chan, 18. "We had to research that."

The Unionville student, who worked with a team of students from across Canada on the idea, said her team leader got the idea from farmers near his home who complained about having to constantly scoop up all the manure their cows produced.

"Farmers pay people to go around a field and shovel up the manure because it releases methane and causes soil and water pollution," she explained.

But with this apparatus, farmers can collect the manure with ease and Ms Chan said the bags pay for themselves within a year.

Of course, it's not just farmers' money her team is interested in saving.

If the idea catches on, it could play a huge role in saving the environment, the goal of all nine products on display Thursday afternoon at the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto.

The products, including an environmentally friendly toothbrush, a moisture-sensitive sprinkler and a modified car exhaust system designed to eliminate 60 per cent of car pollution, were conceived by students who attended Shad Valley, a summer program designed to encourage exceptional youth to develop their engineering and entrepreneurship skills.

This year, 18 York Region students were among the 180 students and nine teams who made the finals, a ratio that impressed organizer Linda Wilson.

"These students are from across Canada and there are even some from overseas,"



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Newmarket native Tandy Briggs was part of a team representing Lakehead University that created Green Teach, an environmental awareness teaching kit. Their work was displayed at the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto Thursday.

she said, "which is why it's so surprising to have so many from one area."

Newmarket native Tandy Briggs, 18, said it has been "a great learning experience", even though it was initially hard for her group to come up with an idea.

"They did the environment (as a theme) four years ago and so a lot of the stuff we came up with had already been done," she said.

"We made a list of 150 ideas, and everything was invented. Then we went back to the drawing board, made another list of 100 and they were already invented."

Eventually, her group came up with GreenTeach, a

teaching kit designed to help Grade 6 teachers incorporate environmental issues into their lesson plans.

She said it was an experience she'll never forget.

"In school, you tend to work, work, work and you never get a reward for it," she said.

"Your reward here is that you work with all these wonderful people and you learn so much from them. And they have a lot of fun while they're working."

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That certainly seemed the case with Miranda Fong, 17, a Richmond Hill student who produced a promotional video starring Witti, the toilet-dwelling alligator.

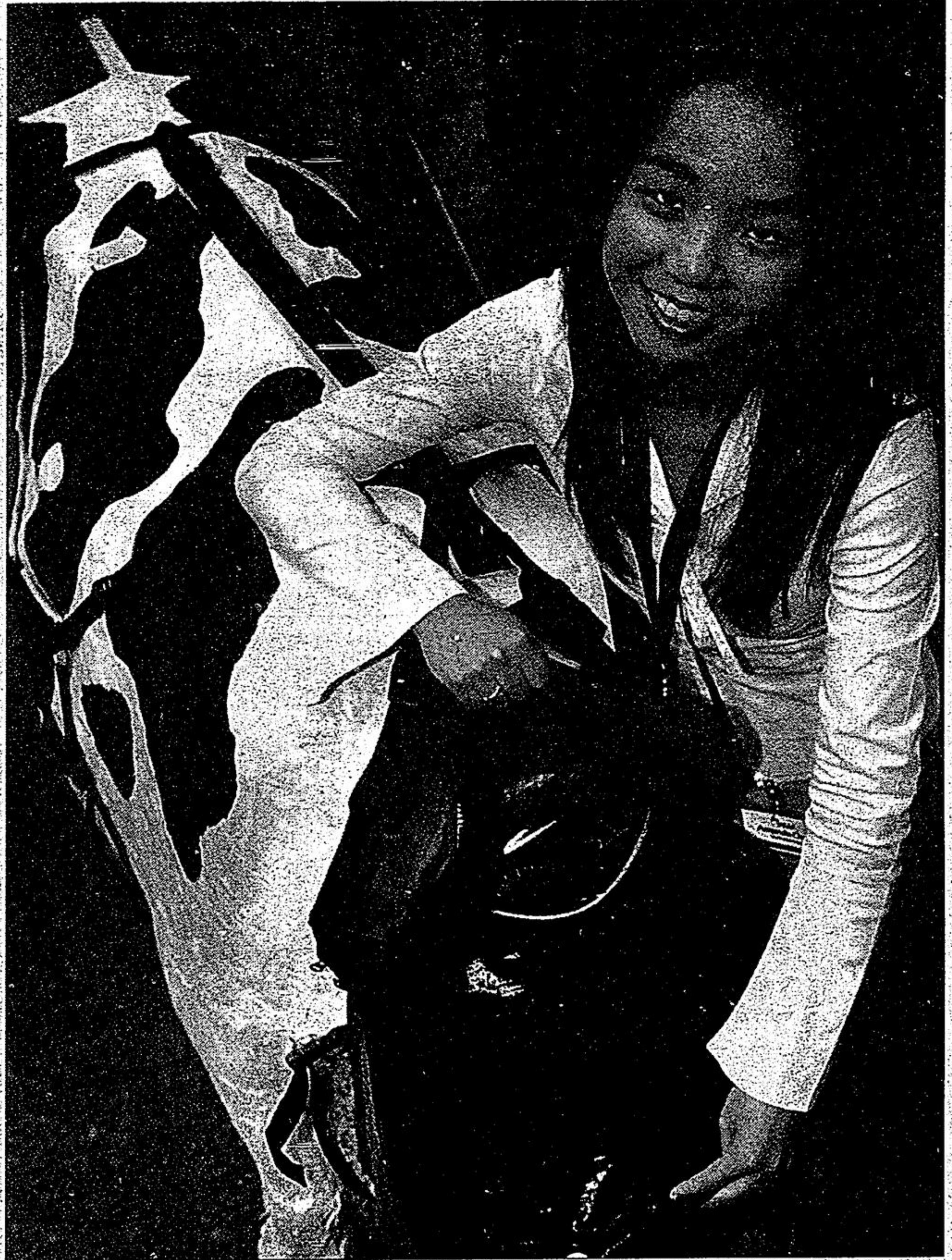
It's his job to introduce Flush ... More or Less, a simple device that allows a toilet user to reduce the amount of water in a flush.

"The cost for the prototype is only about \$17," Ms Fong said and, while her teammates have no plans yet for marketing or patenting the device, "I'm sure we'll do something useful with it."

Jack Pal, president of Shad International, said the reason his organization brings the students together is to encourage young people to explore their inventive and entrepreneurial sides, not to mention give them "a sense of self."

"They get a sense of, 'I can do it.' They get a sense of ability. They get a sense of, 'Gee, there are things I hadn't thought about but are really interesting to me.'"

To learn more about the program, visit www.shad.ca. Mitchell Brown can be reached via e-mail at mbrown@theliberal.com



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Amanda Chan, a Unionville student, was part of a team representing Queen's University who designed the bovine nutrient management apparatus, a sack which collects waste from cattle. Miranda Fong (left), a student at Richmond Hill's St. Robert's Catholic High School, was part of a team which created Flush, an efficient toilet flush system. It was part of Shad International's entrepreneurial competition on display at the Ontario Science Centre.

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