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Students finalists in documentary film contest

By JACK HOPKINS
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Three Georgetown-area students have been selected as semi-finalists for an international film competition.

Bryan Nichols, Adam Griffith and Sarah Hope interviewed students at Berea College about the Bluegrass Army Depot and how old chemical weapons are stored eight miles from their campus.

In their 60-second video, called "Environmental Justice," only one student was able to answer questions about the weapons dump.

Ron Nichols, Bryan's father, wanted to teach the students about the issue and make a short documentary about it. But, he said, shortening the film to 60 seconds was tough.

"The biggest thing was to try to convey a story in that amount of time, because we had so much information," he said.

The competition, Film Your Issue 2007, is an Internet-based global film competition that is sponsored by Yahoo! and others.

The students learned that the old bombs were supposed to have been disposed by the end of April, but officials at the depot said that it might be 2023 until they are gone because of a lack of funding. Some of the chemical weapons are in canisters that date back to the 1940s.

Ron Nichols attended Berea College and frequently returns for visits. Before one trip, he told Hope about the depot, but she didn't want to believe it.

"Sarah thought I was joking about the depot, so when we got there, and got permission to do the documentary, they got to see what I was talking about," he said.

Once Hope saw the depot, she was in awe of its location and what was living around it.

"I was zoned into it and surprised at how there was livestock right next to it," Hope said.

Hope also said that she was concerned that the government hasn't gotten rid of the depot.

"I don't know how in America, we worry about other countries and how we don't take care of our own nerve gases, that endanger people," she said.

Griffith agreed.

"I learned a lot about how the government and politicians can let communities have so many veterans' homes by the depot and how they haven't funded the nerve gases," he said.

Bryan Nichols was excited about the trip and chance to interview people on the issue for a video project.

"I thought it was really interesting that there are bombs and nerve agents so close to the neighborhoods, but no one knew about it," Bryan Nichols said.

Ryan Cummings, of Film Your Issue, said the students did an excellent job on their video.

"It was a really cool concept and they're all very young students. Especially for their age, it shows concern that you don't see a lot," Cummings said.

In order for the Scott County students to advance in the competition, they must gain one of the highest voting tallies on the project Web site.

"Environmental Justice" is available for viewing and voting on the Web site;
http://www.jumpcut.com/groups/detail?subnav=grp_vote&g_id=2C1F5860A27C11DBA9AC5A856F9CC894.

Voting by the public and VIP Jury began May 18 and continues through Thursday.



*News-Graphic/Jack Hopkins
Bryan Nichols, left, Sarah Hope and Adam Griffith
show off a dummy bomb.*