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Locals to study overseas this summer

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By Ashley Matthew

Staff Writer

Two local residents will be studying abroad for nine days this summer to gather research as part of a seven-month Miami University course.

Dr. Kenneth Willman, of Fairfield, and Andrea Kaercher, of Lebanon, will be completing studies as part of Project Dragonfly's Earth Expedition program at Miami University.

Earth Expeditions is a global conservation and education program that combines university courses with projects in Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas.

Willman, who has a Bachelors in Chemistry, PhD in Analytical Chemistry and is currently majoring in Zoology, will be studying conservation and marine ecology in Belize.

"I've been retired for about 10 months now," Willman said. "I wanted to do something different after retirement so the program at Miami University interested me."

Willman said he traveled to many countries while working for Proctor & Gamble, including Japan, China, Venezuela and Mexico, but has never been to Belize.

"My daughter, who just graduated two years ago, took a tropical biology class in Belize," Willman said. "I'm looking forward to seeing some of the places she's seen."

Willman also looks forward to seeing a community bamboo sanctuary where farmers and landowners have chosen to preserve a unique bamboo in the area.

"Conservation programs have an appeal to me," Willman said. "Science has so many wonderful opportunities to grow. One of the fun things about science is you're discovering things all around you."

Andrea Kaercher, a science teacher at Kings Junior High School, will be a part of the Monteverde Cloud Forest group during her trip to Costa Rica and will study Neotropical ecology.

"When we get there, we'll get to immerse ourselves in the ecosystem," Kaercher said. "I'll be studying the decline of the golden toad."

Kaercher has a Bachelor's in Education from Northern Kentucky University and a Masters in Science from Walden University.

She said she hopes to bring things back to her junior high students lessons from her experience.

"Even if it's not my student's favorite subject, I can apply what I learn to my classroom setting," Kaercher said. "One of my goals from this opportunity is to continue my education in an adventurous fashion and share my story with kids so they can see what doors can be open to them. Science is a wonderful field with many different opportunities."

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