

The New Three "R's"

Jupiter students reduce, reuse & recycle

By Laura Figueroa

Pens, paper, books, shovels, rubber gloves, water testing kits—these are the standard school supplies if you're a student at the **Jupiter High School Environmental Research and Field Studies Academy**. While Shakespeare noted that "all the world's a stage," for the students at JERFSA, all the world's a classroom.

This isn't your traditional high school setting. Here, the four walls of a conventional classroom are broken down to get real-world experience. Zoning out in class isn't an option when you're learning about wetland studies at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, or witnessing first-hand how to save animals in oil spills at the Busch Wildlife Hospital.

"Not only do you learn politically how you need to help the environment, but you actually get out there, plant the trees, and see them grow up," says Joseph Porcivia, 15, a member of the school's Environthon team. "You actually see something get done."

The ABC's of agriculture, biology, and conservation only scratch the surface of what these students really learn. The school's curriculum promotes a "team-like atmosphere," which Neal White, Jupiter High's environmental science coordinator, says promotes leadership in the students and faculty.

"By being a part of this program, it gets you out into the real world where you have to do real things," Porcivia says. "You just can't sit back—you have to step up to the plate and take your best swing at things. That turns you into a leader without you even knowing it."

Along with sophomore classmates Stephan Swanson, Kasey Snyder, Lindsay Baker, and Caitlan Swacett, Porcivia formed the school's Environthon team. This is a program sponsored by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, where teams of students work together to develop solutions to environmental problems. Teams exist in schools nationwide, and students compete on district, state, and national levels. Last year, the team placed fourth at the district

level for a tree-planting project they coordinated.

As freshmen, the group organized an effort to plant trees at the Grassy Waters Preserve. The Arthur R. Marshall Foundation offered the school \$1,500 if the students could recruit 150 volunteers to plant 3,000 trees. The students not only organized this massive project to register volunteers, train team leaders, assemble teams, and plant trees, but they exceeded their expectations by gathering over 300 volunteers and planting 5,802 trees in just two hours.



Go Deep: Academy students go to great depths to explore "Warrior Reef," the artificial reef created from construction debris.

"Their enthusiasm and dedication to the project was an outstanding example of what young stewards of the environment can accomplish through teamwork and leadership," says John Marshall of the Marshall Foundation.

JERFSA students are earning more than A's and B's in the classroom, as the students and school have been recognized with several state and federal awards. Most recently, the school was bestowed with the 2003 Four C's Award from the U.S. Department of the Interior for working to develop multiple uses for the Jupiter Inlet Natural Area. The Four C's award was created by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton to honor groups or individuals who excel in communication, consultation and cooperation in the service of conservation.

Academy students participate in more than 20 field activities per year, including at least one overnight field trip. Students not only learn lessons in local sites like the Everglades Youth Camp or the Dreher Park Zoo, but they have the chance to study at locations like Yellowstone National Park and the Central American rainforest.

"There's no substitute for students experiencing first hand the reality of lessons in the classroom," White says.

Once they reach their junior year of high school, students can take dual enrollment classes at **Florida Atlantic University** and **Palm Beach Community College** to earn college credit. Several of the school's students take 18 specific college credits to complete the state university system's "Environmental Certification Program."

"Being in this program makes me feel that I can make a difference," says Lindsay Baker, 15. "It's making me think of beyond high school and beyond college. I'm thinking about what I'm going to do with my life, how I'm going to go where I want to go, and how I'm going to help the environment."

While the school receives up to 150 applicants a year, only 60 are selected. Students must enter the program in the

ninth grade because, as White says, "It's a four-year program that builds on knowledge and training from year to year."

When they're not out improving the environment, students are improving themselves. Developing leadership skills is an important facet of the program's curriculum. As eleventh graders, the students participate in three ropes course activities throughout the semester. Last year, one of the activities challenged teams of students to build the tallest structure they could, using only dry spaghetti and duct tape. White says the objective of the activity was to show students how to communicate effectively in a group setting.

"If I wasn't part of this Academy, I wouldn't be able to get out there and communicate with other people," Swacett says. "I think the Academy helps me become a leader by showing me how to help and listen to other people."

Giving back and inspiring others to take an interest in environmental issues is important to the academy's students. Through the Environmental Outreach Program, students visit local elementary schools to educate children about the environment through children's literature and field trip opportunities.

As if planning restoration projects for the Everglades or doing homework for arboriculture class isn't enough, 68 percent of the Academy's students are active in other extra-curricular activities like the school band and the football team. Overall, JERFSA logs an average of 6,500 community service hours per year.

"Being in this Academy makes me feel like I'm making a difference," Swanson says. "I don't want to be that kid who just sits around and plays video games all day. I want to do something in this world." 🐼

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