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The WEC Newsletter

The Waterborne Education Center

Jan/Feb/Mar 2008

More than Education

by Jo Ann Baird

In Fall 2007, the WEC was approached by Paula Cooper, the high school aquatics science teacher from Eastwood Academy, in Houston. She wanted her students to experience the Texas Coast, not just once, but several times over the course of the school year. Jo Ann Baird, WEC Field Lab Coordinator, recounts her experiences aboard their trips.

Eastwood Academy students drag a seine in Long Island Bayou, at the mouth of the Trinity River.

This elite group of young people first boarded the Waterborne Education Center vessel on October 8, 2007. We met at the Anahuac Harbor, near the mouth of the Trinity River. Terrie Looney, Chambers/Jefferson County Marine Agent, facilitated this field lab. She reviewed and demonstrated all Coast Guard regulations for safety and introduction of Captain Larrimer and deckhand, James Smith before Eastwood's boarding. Terrie gave a brief history of the vessels, harbor history, and Lake Anahuac. The students were given there pre- test and set off on there adventure.

These high school juniors and seniors stopped at the Wallisville Locks, where Park Rangers Russell Malahy and Ruth Millsap gave a presentation on the importance of the saltwater barrier to this particular area. Then we walked to the huge hinged, pie shaped locks for a demonstration of the operation.

Once again on the vessel, we traveled to Long Island Bayou to offload into the wetlands. The kids all booted up with their hip waders, buckets, nets, seines, specimen jars and water testing equipment. You could see and feel the eagerness and willingness to learn (truly soaking it up). Some of the species of marine life that were caught were tiny blue crab, shrimp, clams, menhaden and silversides.

The second trip was based on our local birds, which inhabit most of the Upper Texas Coast. Brian Baird, a birding specialist, served as the facilitator for this field lab. He brought along personal photo albums, as well as reference books.

After being introduced to a new crew, Captain Ricks and James Jackson, the students boarded the vessel. Captain Ricks moved up river for our excursion. The facilitator pointed out the birds overhead, in trees, feeding from the banks and perched on the logs that have settled in the shoals that border the mouth of the Trinity. The birds spotted that day were brown pelicans, roseate spoonbills, snowy egret, great egret, great blue heron, red-winged blackbird and osprey. And of course, alligators were seen on our trip all around. For the first time in recorded WEC history, the student's knowledge from the pre-test to the post-test increased by 55 percent.

The students came back for their third trip, which focused on marshes, grasses and saving

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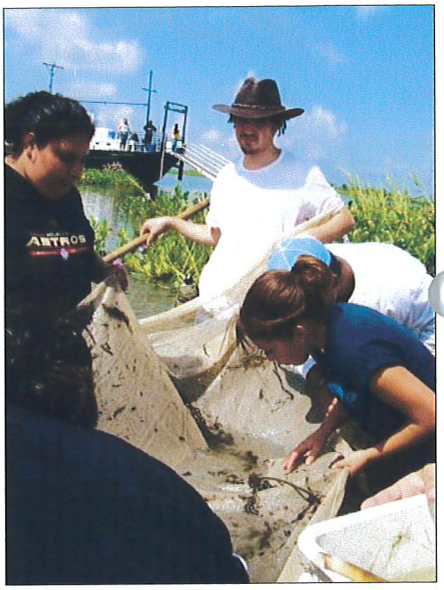
our coastal areas. The WEC facilitator was Eddie Seidensticker with NRCA. The students helped him unload all the grasses from his truck to the harbor and placed them on each side of the bow. Captain Larrimer and James Jackson motored the students to Long Island Bayou, where the grasses were unloaded by all, along with shovels and hip waders, intent on creating wetlands.

Some of the grasses that the students planted were phragmities, spartina, and cattails. Mr. Seidensticker parted the grasses and reeds with his hands, and stepped inside the wetlands that the WEC and students with SeaWorld Adventure Camp planted four years earlier. Once inside the grasses, reeds waved over their heads. Some of the reeds had grown over 13 feet. Mr. Seidensticker demonstrated how all the different parts of the cattail were once used by the American Indians. He also showed different root systems of our grasses. Some of the students even taste tested the cattail, providing flavor descriptions including cucumber, squash, celery, and watermelon. We motored off from the area, knowing they had a hand in saving part of our Texas Coast.

In December, Ms. Cooper's class invited the WEC staff and Eddie Seidensticker to their end-of-term presentations and lunch. Each student gave an artistic interpretation of what they had learned while participating in WEC field labs, and how this knowledge affected their lives. The presentations ranged from photo slideshows and collages, to musical interpretations, to culinary art. (See one example below.) Following the presentations, the class and their guests enjoyed a pot-luck dinner prepared by the students. Delicious!

Thanks to this extremely bright and promising group of young people for reminding us why we do what we do. You are the perfect rebuttal to those who doubt the capability of future generations. We look forwarded to seeing you again this spring!

(Below) Students, led by Eddie Seidensticker, participate in a chilly wetlands restoration project. **(Right)** Students examine their catch in a seine in Long Island Bayou.



The World As We Know It

By: Noah Villanueva and Araceli Garcia

The world as we know it
Is coming to an end
Because of man's inexcusable sins.
We must act now if we wish
To live.
Our environment around
Us is starting to give.

Who are we to pollute the streams?
From Anahuac Bay to Colorado
We are killing life, water, and vegetation
and all that is green.
With Global Warming in the way
We are taking nature's beauty away.

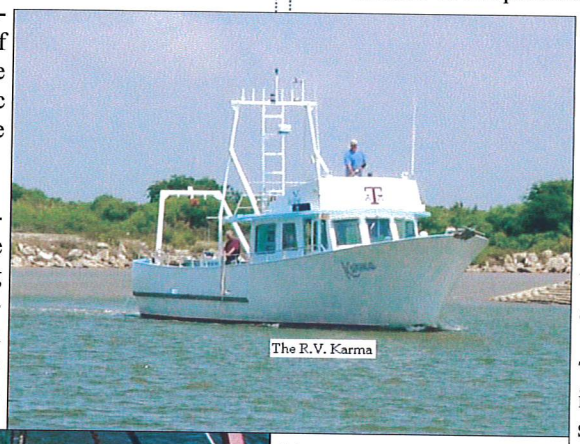
There's burning hot temperatures
And more gases in our air
Overpowering Mother Nature.
Does anyone really care?

There's so much to learn
About conserving our Planet.
If caring was a seed
I hope to definitely plant it.
The gators in the Trinity
Will be gone and dead.
Let's try to do something
Today, so tomorrow, we won't
dread.

Recycling is easy
And should be done by all.
I'd like to see people who
Don't litter
People who don't litter at all.
This world as we know it,
Is not gonna be around
Much longer.
So let's do something to
Save the planet.
I really hope my
Words have made you ponder.

Texas Science Educators Add a Little Salt to Their Careers

The Texas Sea Grant Extension Program of Texas A&M University and the privately-run Upper Texas Coast Waterborne Education Center will collaborate to offer science educators an uncommon professional development opportunity along the shores and on the waters of the Texas Gulf Coast this summer. The workshop is open to teachers from public and private schools, along with those from informal and home school settings.


The R.V. Karma

This training program will run from Monday, June 2 to Friday, June 6, with unique first-hand learning experiences taking place in Anahuac, Galveston and Matagorda. In Anahuac, the focus will be on the biology and ecology of the dynamic watershed transitions, which occur where the Trinity River meets Galveston Bay. While traveling from Anahuac to Matagorda, the teachers will stop over in Galveston to capture a sense of the bio-medical research centered on squid, octopi and cuttlefish and the recovery of endangered sea turtles through the nationally-run head start program. In Matagorda, the emphasis will shift to developing a hands-on appreciation for the physical and chemical properties of seawater and gaining a fuller understanding of the intriguing adaptations of marine plants and animals and how they work to their distinct advantage. The adaptation sessions are crafted to train observers of nature (students and teachers) to determine the purpose of both anatomical features and behaviors.

Above: The R.V. Karma embarks on a tour.

Left: Willie Younger instructs students aboard the R.V. Karma.

This week-long competence and confidence building train-the-trainer (a.k.a. teach-the-teacher) program will be led by experienced marine educators and researchers. The field experience will include two discovery cruises aboard specially equipped teaching vessels, as well as investigative beach and wetland excursions. Classroom and lab activities will add value to this training experience since they are all designed to be easily taught by these motivated educators on their return to their teaching settings. To facilitate ease in delivering these learning experiences at their respective teaching setting, participating educators (i.e., teachers, curriculum specialists, etc.) will each be given a teaching kit containing the equipment, supplies and step-by-step instructions needed to carry out each lesson in their own classrooms and labs. All that will be needed to make this a routine part of their science instruction is – "Just add water!"

The expressed desire of the workshop's sponsors is to show teachers, regardless of whether they live in El Paso or Tyler, that the form and function of sea phenomena can offer very alluring and effective topics for developing interest and involvement in the sciences. The cost-recovery fee for this five-day traveling learning adventure for Texas' career educators is only $500 and includes meals, snacks, lodging (double occupancy), discovery cruise passes, instruction and workshop materials. Scholarships to partially cover the tuition will be based on applicant need and funds available.

Those wishing to enroll, or receive more information on the marine science instruction offered, itinerary for the week or the scholarship application process should contact Willie Younger, Extension Marine Education Specialist at 979/863-2049 or floatingclassroom@ag.tamu.edu. The enrollment closes April 18, 2008, or when the class limit of 20 is met, whichever comes first. Early registration is highly encouraged.

GBEP Grant

The WEC is excited to announce the recent funding award received from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, a program of the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality. This partnership will be used to support the WEC Outreach Program in 2008 and 2009.

GALVESTON BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM

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The goal of the project is to increase interest and participation in the WEC's on-the-water program through an expanded outreach program. Funds will support participation in outreach events, such as GatorFest, Bay Day, and C.A.S.T., and publishing of six bi-monthly newsletters, such as this one. This grant will also sponsor two VIP field labs and at least one teacher workshop. GBEP funding will also cover the renovation of the existing WEC website to include more interactivity and to present a more professional appearance that better represents the organization.

The
Waterborne Education Center

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Check out the website
www.txwaterborne.org

Mark Your Calendar

- ***March 29th:*** Chambers County Sesquicentennial Birthday Bash at Fort Anahuac Park
- ***April 12th:*** WEC Public Wetlands Education Program boat day. Open to the general public.
- ***April 19th:*** Earth Day at Armand Bayou Nature Center 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- ***May 10th:*** WEC Public Wetlands Education Program boat day. Open to the general public.
- ***May 17th:*** Bay Day Festival at Kemah Boardwalk, sponsored by Galveston Bay Foundation 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- ***June 2 - 6:*** Teacher Workshop hosted by the WEC & Texas A&M Floating Classroom beginning in Anahuac and ending in Matagorda

You Don't Say

"Civilization began around wetlands; today's civilization has every reason to leave them wet and wild."

- Edward Maltby,
Waterlogged Wealth, 1986

Our Mission

To foster appreciation and stewardship of coastal resources, heritage and culture by providing hands-on waterborne education services