

Cover Story



Bob Wasno explains about all the research that occurs at the Florida Gulf Coast University Vester Marine and Environmental Science Research Field Station in Bonita Springs. ANDREA STETSON/CORRESPONDENT

Students visit Vester Field Station

Andrea Stetson
Special to Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

A new partnership between the Florida Gulf Coast University Vester Marine and Environmental Science Research Field Station in Bonita Springs and children with special needs from Sea Gate Elementary School in North Naples is creating great memories and experiences.

This past week 10 children in kindergarten through second grade from the modified curriculum (MC3) class, visited the research station to learn about the work they do there and to prepare for future projects.

Bob Wasno, resource coordinator for the FGCU Vester Field Station, said he is excited about the partnership.

"It really was a lot of fun," he said. "It was one of my most enjoyable days."

Wasno said the children had been studying about oyster reefs and local fish, so they came prepared.

"Those kids were already primed up from what was presented to them in the classroom," he said. "They just had no limits to what their questions were."

"They tried hard. It was nice to see. They were refreshing. I loved their enthusiasm."

The field trip began in the classroom at the research station where Wasno showed the children some skulls.

"Does anyone know what this is from?" Wasno asked as he held the large skull of a loggerhead turtle.

"A T. rex," answered second-grader Kevin Maldonado.

When Wasno held up a manatee skull, Logan Kushner, a first-grader, had his answer.

"An elephant," Logan said.

Because manatees are related to the elephant, Wasno said he was impressed with the answer.

The children got to help feed the fish in the lab. Another highlight was seeing how hockey sticks are used to make oyster reefs.

For the past four years FGCU has been building oyster beds made from used hockey sticks. Wasno said they have created more than 200 reefs.

This month Bauer sent FGCU 2,000 new hockey sticks that will be used to build more than 200 more reefs. The Sea Gate students plan to return to the re-



Bob Wasno showed the children a small reef that was made from hockey sticks. ANDREA STETSON/CORRESPONDENT

search station to help build one of them. The children are also now helping with a mangrove project. They were given a mangrove seedling to grow in their classroom.

"We hope it gets bigger in the classroom and then they can put it on the mangrove island," Wasno said. "And we want them to come back and build an oyster reef."

Wasno and some FGCU students have been creating a small mangrove island just beyond the research station.

Meredith Kirby, principal at Sea Gate

Elementary School, said the experience was great for the students.

"It really just allows our students to have a hands-on experience with living in coastal Florida," she began. "Her group is so much younger, but it is still exposing them to a variety of different jobs that are available. The tiniest resource of growing a mangrove and planting that and what that means to our community is so powerful, and to foster that relationship, not only for the one class, but for other grade levels."

When Wasno told some of the FGCU

students that the Sea Gate children would be at the research station, several volunteered to come help.

"Students just came down on their own, and I really liked how they engaged with the kids," Wasno said.

Wasno said he enjoyed watching the Sea Gate children get excited about learning.

"That is all they need. It is exposure that they wouldn't get otherwise," he said. "We will definitely be continuing to do things with them."



EDITOR

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Our town

The second annual Unified Track Event for Lee County High Schools was held at Estero High School on Friday, Jan. 31. The event is a joint effort between the school district and Lee County Parks & Recreation's Special Olympics Program. JON AUSTRIA/NAPLES DAILY NEWS/USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA



ON THE COVER

Children from Sea Gate Elementary School learned about how hockey sticks are being used to make reefs for oysters. The students visited Florida Gulf Coast University's Vester Marine and Environmental Science Research Field Station in Bonita Springs.
Andrea Stetson/Correspondent

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FGCU's Vester Field Station hosts Sea Gate Elementary students for learning day **PAGE 8A**

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