

Students dig deep for lessons on science, wetland restoration

By **STEVEN WARD**
River parishes bureau

BLUFF SWAMP — Pierre Part Middle School student Rocky Morgan has both of his hands in a hole he's been digging in some soggy mud near Alligator Bayou.

The dirt on his royal blue T-shirt and dark sweat-pants can't compete with the build-up of earth on his stubby fingers.

"I don't mind. This is my favorite subject — mud," Morgan, 15, said while waiting for one of his classmates to bring some fertilizer over to drop into his freshly clawed-out hole.

Morgan and 60 of his eighth-grade classmates from Pierre Part Middle spent Friday morning planting baldcypress and wax myrtle trees on a patch of land in the Bluff Swamp near Alligator Bayou in Ascension Parish.

The field trip was part of LSU's Louisiana Sea Grant College program, "Coastal Roots: School Seedling Nursery Program for Wetland Restoration."

"One of the ideas of all this is to take the classroom out of the building and put the classroom outdoors,"

“ People around here cut the trees down. LSU gave us the seeds to come here and put the trees back.”

— Rocky Morgan, student,
Pierre Part Middle School

LSU horticulture Professor Ed Bush said.

Friday, the Assumption Parish students planted 356 baldcypress seedlings and 79 wax myrtles.

The point of the class and the program is not just green thumb instruction and science. The students are learning about the environment and specifically about restoring valuable wetland reserves.

"People around here cut the trees down. LSU gave us the seeds to come here and put the trees back. This is where wildlife lives, and they need these trees," Morgan said.

Tightly clasping a giant jar of fertilizer, Andrew

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Dirt

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Braud, 14, said he's glad LSU gave his classmates the seeds in May.

"This is our way of fighting back. Fighting back with an eco-system," Braud said.

Rachel Somers, marine education specialist with the Louisiana Sea Grant Program, said the feedback from the Pierre Part students Friday was enthusiastic.

"The kids really understand what all of this is about. They see the connections and the long-term effects these trees will have. They understand, hands-on, what wetland restoration is," Somers said.

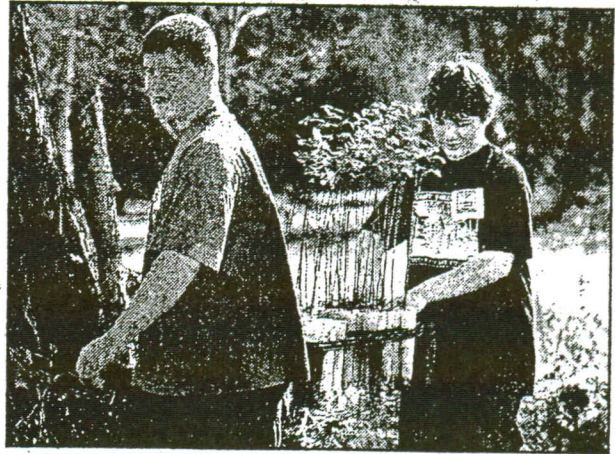
Pierre Part Middle science teacher John Giambone is one of the teachers responsible for instructing the students about wetland restoration in the classroom.

"The students have been watering the seedlings and watching them closely," Giambone said.

Pierre Part Middle is just one of nine Louisiana schools participating in the LSU program.

Schools that have either already planted trees or will plant their seedlings soon at various locations in south Louisiana are:

Abbeville High School in Vermilion Parish; Central Lafourche High School, Cut Off Junior High School and South Lafourche High School in Lafourche Parish; St. Joseph's Academy in Baton Rouge; Livonia High School in Pointe Coupee Parish; Devall Middle School in Port Allen; and Grace King High School in Metairie.



Advocate staff photo by Travis Spradling

Rocky Morgan, 15, left, and Chris Holden, 14, tramp through mud and puddles carrying a rack of baldcypress tree seedlings as they and other Pierre Part Middle School students plant trees Friday morning at Alligator Bayou. The students grew the trees from seed, as part of a wetlands project they took part in with the LSU Agricultural Center. The students were planting baldcypress trees and wax myrtle trees.