

The Jackson High School Bitter Panicum project

By Donna Boudreaux

The Bitter Panicum project started Fall 2006 when Wilbert Green, Donna Boudreaux and eight Jackson High School students took a bus trip to Golden Meadow, La., to the United States Department of Agriculture plant materials center. The group gathered Bitter Panicum plant materials to plant, grow and nurture and, one day, to plant on the Louisiana coast as Jackson High School's contribution to coastal restoration.

You might wonder what any business with the coast has to do with Jackson High School. It has plenty to do with all of us.

As you enjoy your next shrimp po' boy or your crawfish boils, think about where that delicious food and probably the fun that food inspires comes from. That is only the start of our relationship with Louisiana's coast.

The impact of our eroding coastline is far reaching, as Louisiana oil and gas reaches all over the world in everybody's life every day. Am I exaggerating? Most of the time I do to make a point about something or to be humorous. Now, however, when I turn on my lights or when I am ready to check my e-mails or drive my car with my fancy tires and hub caps, I thank God for sparing our coast one more day for my necessities and pleasures.

Most of these do come from Louisiana's vanishing coastline.

East Feliciana Parish, you can be proud of the students at Jackson High School who grow Bitter Panicum. For every mile of this marsh grass, a Hurricane 5 storm surge is reduced by one foot.

Our program is part of Louisiana State University's Coastal Roots project, which Dr. Pam Blanchard coordi-

nates.

In the spring, the Bitter Panicum project students and parents will travel south to plant our crop. Jackson High School will do its part to help the vanishing Louisiana coast survive.

Our principal, Joseph Jones Jr., had the vision that a project of this sort would bring opportunity to the Jackson High School student population.

Internationally recognized photographer C. C. Lockwood has spent more than a 30-year career capturing the Louisiana waterways. He has brought the plight of the vanishing coast to many people through his efforts organized as a marsh mission. I had the privilege of attending a workshop summer 2005, during which Lockwood's spirit of love and concern for our beautiful coastal resource touched me to the point that I had to pick up the ball and run with it as well.

Our group has now merged photography with horticulture to enjoy new experiences, while assisting Mother Nature with coastal restoration.

Photograph by Beth Dawson

Right: Jeffery and Sean Mahau work on the project. The Bitter Panicum is in front of them. They are fixing a cover to put over the school's green plants that don't need a lot of sun. Although school is not in session Mondays due to the four-day school week in the parish, these young men visit the school on Mondays to work on the project.

