



HOPE MAZZENO

From left are Hailee Barrett, Ava McClain, DeJane Wilson and Megan Hoolahan. They are planting a bald cypress tree at Bayou Segnette State Park in Westwego. The tree planting was part of the Coastal Roots Project of the seventh-grade science class at St. Martin's Episcopal School in Metairie.

Students help restore wetlands

They grow, plant seedlings in program

By Hope Mazzeno
Contributing writer

Kate Marchal, a middle school science teacher at St. Martin Episcopal School in Metairie, said she wanted her

students to be involved in restoring the wetlands and coastal habitats of Louisiana.

So with help from a service grant from the Joe W. and Dorothy Dorsett Brown Foundation, Marchal was able to do just that and signed up the students in the Coastal Roots Program.

According to the Web site — <http://lamer.lsu.edu/projects/coastalroots> — stu-

dents in fourth grade through high school in south Louisiana are taking part in this project by establishing wetland plant nurseries at their schools by growing native plant seedlings that they will plant in a coastal habitat restoration project in south Louisiana.

The Coastal Roots Program began in 2001 as an educational outreach project for the Louisiana Sea Grant Col-

lege Program. In 2006, the program was transitioned into the Louisiana State University Department of Educational Theory, Policy and Practice and also the LSU Center for Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences.

In an e-mail from Pam Blanchard, coastal roots director, she wrote that the pro-

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Last year, students built seedling nursery

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gram has three objectives.

"The first objective is to conduct an ongoing school-based nursery program growing native plants," Blanchard wrote. "Secondly involve students in a hands-on habitat restoration planting. And the third objective is to provide teachers and students with information on issues such as ecological stewardship, wetlands functions/values, wetland loss, habitat restoration and conservation as well as basic horticulture skills."

Marchal began the program at St. Martin's three years ago.

"Wetlands education is important for students who live in this area," Marchal said. "As a teacher, I feel it is necessary

that we teach our students about the restoration of the wetlands and coastal habitation. The Coastal Roots Program has been a great project for St. Martin's; we have already seen how we have made a difference."

Last year, the class built their seedling nursery on the campus of the Metairie school with funding from the Brown Foundation. Cypress and red maple seeds were sent to Marchal for the students to plant. The students built a can yard, a 10-by-10-foot fenced-in area at the school that has an irrigation system on a timer.

The seeds were planted in yellow cells in the can yard. The students periodically weeded the plants and checked them for

any problems until they were ready to do the planting.

The yellow cells, Marchal said, are used so the plants can easily be transplanted into the ground at our planting site.

Students oversee the entire growth cycle of the plants, from seed germination to the planting of the seedlings.

The planting took place last fall at Bayou Segnette State Park in Westwego. Blanchard, along with Denise McKinney, a ranger of the park, gave a brief talk about the important role that the students played in this project as well as instructions about the planting.

The students then planted 250 cypress trees and 50 red maple seedlings in a designated area in the park.

"The students did a great job of properly planting their seedlings," Blanchard said. "And they worked very efficiently to get their seedlings planted quickly."

Students Ali Lange and Grant Lejuene said they were excited about the project.

"It was great to come out and getting our seedlings planted," Ali said. "It really made us realize the importance of restoring our habitat."

"As my group planted the seedlings, it made me proud that we were doing this project," Grant added. "We are contributing to the restoration of the habitat by planting tree by tree. Restoring this area will be our responsibility one day."

Blanchard said there are 18

schools actively participating in the program in south Louisiana, with the possibility of 12 more schools taking part this new year.

"Ultimately, we want students

to see themselves as having ability to make a positive change in the environment. We want them to think of themselves as stewards of our coastal resources," Blanchard said.

Kenner Piccadilly

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 2009