Area students help save coast by planting trees

By Holly Leleux-Thubron
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FRANKLIN — When Dr. Pam Blanchard, a geologist, arrived in Louisiana in the early 1990s she knew the state was in big trouble. Blanchard said "regular folks" did not understand why the state was losing its wetlands at such a rapid pace, the geology that also was in play and the future devastation in store if residents here do nothing.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, in the past 15 years Louisiana has lost 1,500 square miles of coastal wetlands, which represents 80 percent of the total wetlands lost in the United States.

"Louisiana’s coastal marshes and estuarine basins are under assault — mostly from wind and wave action, storms, altered hydrology and sediment replenishment regimes and subsidence," she said.

One way to combat the problem and offer more protection to Louisiana coastal communities is...
TREES: Program started in 2001

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said.

The site where the 900 trees were planted was the location of an abandoned oil well that was clear cut to make room for drilling rigs and other equipment up until two years ago when the company packed up and left, Paul Yakupzack of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

What remained at the site was an open field, vulnerable to invasive tree species, which are not as productive as cypress and that would have surely taken over, he said.

Not only will the cypress saplings grow to provide food and shelter for the Refuge’s animal popula-
tion, they will also do a small part in lessening the impact of storm surge and flooding from future hurricanes, said Refuge treasurer and activist Donovan Garcia of Jeanerette.

Garcia secured grant funding that allowed Franklin Senior High School to participate in the Coastal Roots Program.

He said every one mile of coastal forest planted between the Gulf of Mexico and your home, has the effect of raising your property a foot higher.

"That is one of the things that nature intended these trees to do for us," he said.

Garcia said he would love to see every school, in every coastal parish participate in the program and encouraged any parent to make a donation to a participating school to enrich their child and have a positive impact on the future of the state.

as simple as planting trees, she said.

Blanchard, an assistant professor at Louisiana State University, developed the Coastal Roots Program in 2001 as a way to provide an "active learning curriculum in which students can explore strategies for sustaining coastal ecosystems and develop an attitude of stewardship toward natural resources."

The program, which has grown to include 36 schools in 16 parishes with another seven schools coming on board by the end of this school year, has planted more than 28,000 plants since its inception.

Franklin Senior High School students increased that number Thursday morning by 900, the largest effort undertaken in one restoration trip, Blanchard said.

Environmental science, chemistry and agriculture students at the school have been growing hundreds of Southern Bald Cypress Trees in a school nursery since the early spring, environmental science teacher Lynn Landry said.

Students and teachers headed to the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge Centerville Unit to combat habitat destruction, a subject they have been studying this past week, Landry