

LSU Coastal Roots program draws visit from EPA head, Alexandra Cousteau

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BATON ROUGE, La (LSU) – Two schools that participate in the LSU Coastal Roots Program have drawn the attention of national organizations vitally interested in happenings in the Louisiana Gulf Coast.

Upon request of teacher Mona Hebert, of the Metairie Academy for Advanced Studies in Jefferson Parish received a visit from Lisa Jackson, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA. Jackson, who grew up in New Orleans, has led the EPA's 17,000-person staff since 2009. She visited the school on Aug. 26.

That same week, Alexandra Cousteau accepted the invitation of teacher Louise Dykes to visit Larose-Cutoff Middle School in Lafourche Parish on Aug. 27. Cousteau is a social environmental advocate and emerging explorer with National Geographic. She is the granddaughter of renowned ocean explorer and filmmaker Jacques Cousteau and is currently writing a book which explores water ecosystems across the planet and their interdependence.

According to Pam Blanchard, director of the LSU Coastal Roots program and associate professor in the LSU College of Education Department of Educational Theory, Policy and Practice, each visit occurred because the teachers were proactive on behalf of their students.

"These teachers are very proud of their involvement in Coastal Roots and are working hard to connect what students are learning and doing in class with what is going on around them in the coastal environment," said Blanchard.

LSU Coastal Roots is designed to raise awareness of coastal restoration and preservation. Students in 40 Louisiana schools plant and raise native Louisiana seedlings and transplant them in carefully selected restoration sites in coastal Louisiana.

At Metairie Academy, Jackson engaged in a spirited 45 minute interactive dialogue with 150 fourth- and fifth-grade students.

"I'm here today just to say thank you," said Jackson. "For once, I don't have to do my job because you're doing such a good job already."

"After Ms. Jackson came, I felt honored to have been complimented by her for planting trees along the Louisiana coastline," said fifth grader Okiemute Eyemaro.

"I think that Administrator Lisa Jackson made all of us feel like what we did with LSU Coastal Roots was really, really important," added fifth grader Ava Schexnayder.

At Larose-Cutoff Middle School, Cousteau visited with a small focus group of nine middle school students before joining a full classroom. In their dialogue, Dykes and the students also shared information about other environmental stewardship projects, including the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, or LUMCON, BayouSide Classroom Program. Cousteau described the effects of the Gulf Coast oil spill on the students and their families and reinforced the importance of keeping our waters clean.

Through LSU Coastal Roots, Larose-Cutoff Middle School is growing beach dune grass called seashore paspalum in their school-based plant nursery. Their grass plugs will be planted at Grand Isle State Park later this year.

Students at Metairie Academy are planting swamp red maple and bald cypress trees which will be transplanted in Jean Lafitte National Park's Barataria Preserve.

"Like the cypress and red maples that we plant, my students and I stand tall and proud of their commitment to help restore the Louisiana coastline and protect the environment," said Hebert. "Through the application of their studies by participating in the LSU Coastal Roots program, my students are able to look to the future and effect change, never forgetting their roots, responsibilities and the reward of a cleaner, healthier environment."

Through efforts such as these, the LSU Coastal Roots Program has engaged more than 4,900 students in planting 44,503 restoration plants on 121 restoration trips since 2000.

For more information, visit <http://coastalroots.lsu.edu> [6].