

EXPLAINING

Cultivating Inspiration

By Nancy Famulari. Photos by Education Department Staff/FTBG



Students from Coral Gables Senior High School observing birds at the Tropical Audubon Society.

Have you ever noticed how your senses are heightened when you're in a new environment? The experience of being in unfamiliar surroundings causes you to be more attuned than you normally are. We are especially receptive to learning and receiving new information in this state.

That's the concept behind **Environmental Immersion Day**.

The Fairchild Challenge hopes that students will be receptive to the novel ideas and career possibilities they encounter during this full day of comprehensive work-study with environmental professionals. Each host site offers hands-on experiences that involve getting dirty while helping the environment. Environmental Immersion Day (EID) also offers urban students an opportunity to reconnect (or connect, as the case may be) with nature.

EID, one of the most popular of the annual high school Fairchild Challenge events, was held on March 23. With the help of our partner sites, this year, nearly 300 Fairchild Challenge students from 31 South Florida high schools participated. Students were hosted by environmentalists, biologists, botanists and researchers in both

laboratories and natural areas, extending from John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo to Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in Palm Beach County. Generous donations helped to cover transportation expenses for schools demonstrating a financial need and meals for students and teachers at several of the sites were provided.

EID offers students a close-up view of environmental professionals at work. This year, students learned about the tropical fruit program (and enjoyed visiting with a beekeeper) at the Fairchild Farm, assisted with the virtual herbarium at Fairchild, collected relevant habitat data and propagation materials at USDA and much more. By serendipity, several of the students assigned to spend the day with the Officer Snook program had been considering careers with the Coast Guard, and were fascinated by the behind-the-scenes

Environmental Immersion Day has been an integral part of the Fairchild Challenge since its inception in 2001. It represents a commitment to a hands-on, interdisciplinary approach to learning and a penchant for combining education with adventure.



Students from Miami Jackson Senior High School examine marine life caught in seine nets at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Biscayne Nature Center.



Students from Miami Jackson Senior High School learn about marine ecology and coastal habitats at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Biscayne Nature Center.

view of an oil spill demonstration and emergency procedures. One student, who had the opportunity to investigate synthetic blood samples from a crime scene at Miami-Dade College's North Campus lab, was grateful for the chance to spend the day in college and is looking forward to returning to that very lab in just a few years. Ninth-graders from TERRA Environmental Research Institute called the trip to the Fairchild Farm "the best field trip ever!" and students from The Samuel Scheck Hillel Day School were enthralled with the scanning electron microscopy activity at Nova Southeastern University's Oceanographic Research Center.

Experts have recognized an urgent need to reconnect youth with nature. Taking students from the confines of their urban school and placing them in new surroundings can open their eyes to nature and the world around them. As one Miami Edison student who visited the Green Railway Organic Workshop (G.R.O.W.) said, "It made me open my eyes to the future!" At G.R.O.W, students learned how to grow and harvest organic herbs and vegetables and discussed the environmental and health benefits of organic food. They were also urged to invest a little more in their health and, after a brief lesson in supply and demand, to become more conscious consumers. Students harvested the herbs and veggies, and then enjoyed a delicious lunch of tarragon chicken, pesto pasta with vegetables and salad with green goddess dressing. The teacher recounted the transformation of her students as they worked with organically grown produce and then sampled it in a meal. "They seemed to come alive, and lose their attitude. They were inquisitive, and eager to try the herbs and vegetables at lunchtime." Environmental Immersion Day has been an integral part of the Fairchild Challenge since its inception in 2001. It represents a commitment to a hands-on, interdisciplinary approach to learning

and a penchant for combining education with adventure. Alison Walker, community outreach coordinator, has devoted considerable time to developing partnerships with South Florida environmental education providers, who display complete professionalism in their work with the high school students. As Education staff visit each site to photograph and witness EID in action, we are reminded of the invaluable influence that adults (and teachers, in particular) have over the lives of young people.

The link between the student, displaying rapt attention in unusual environs working alongside professionals, and the mentor, is beneficial to both and has inspired many Fairchild Challenge students to continue environmental studies and to pursue environmental careers. The important partnership between the Fairchild Challenge and its host sites is making a difference in the lives of the students. Teachers also appreciate the chance to learn from experts, and are inspired to do more hands-on environmental instruction with their students at school.

Students overwhelmingly approved of the EID experience, and took away from it an appreciation for nature and greater environmental awareness. As a student from Barbara Goleman Senior High said, "I kind of get nature now. Before, it was like, you know, just kind of there." When asked if this experience changed his behavior, a student from Somerset Academy Silver Palms responded: "It taught me to cherish it [nature] more." Another student commented: "To know the amount of effort that goes into the protection of the environment is impressive." 100% of students from all the sites surveyed said that, if they could, they would participate again next year, and the majority said that their interest in the environment had increased as a result of the experience.





Photo by Education Staff/FTBG

THE FAIRCHILD CHALLENGE CONTINUES TO GROW LOCALLY AND WORLDWIDE

The Fairchild Challenge continues to engage students from Miami-Dade County and beyond. This year, the program engaged a record 72,000 local students from over 150 elementary, middle and high schools. Throughout the year, students compete to win points for their schools by entering Fairchild Challenge competitions, including writing opinions and research papers; performing songs and skits; creating school gardens, artwork and newsletters; capturing school energy, water and tree-canopy data; designing solar-powered devices; and formulating “green” cuisine menus. The schools that earn the most points win prizes that include grants to support schools’ environmental programs.

This year, Fairchild partnered with Botanic Garden Conservation International to implement “The 2010 Fairchild Challenge/BGCI Global Option” which provided high school students throughout the U.S. with an opportunity to design the cover for the CD single, “Footprints,” by London-based independent band Storey. The song explores the importance of reducing our ecological footprint on Earth. On May 18, the Global Option winner was announced by the band at the 2009-2010 Fairchild Challenge Award Ceremony held in the Garden House. Jose Garcia, an 18-year-old senior at Miami Lakes Education Center, came up with the winning design. He was awarded a framed CD signed by the band, a certificate and Fairchild Challenge medal.

Jose Garcia, an 18-year-old senior at Miami Lakes Education Center, designed the cover for the CD single, “Footprints,” by London-based independent band Storey.



Photo by Education Staff/FTBG

Jose Garcia’s winning cover design for the CD Single.

CDs may be purchased through the Botanic Gardens Conservation International Web site: www.bgci.org/education/2422. The song is also available for download on iTunes. Sale proceeds benefit the Fairchild Challenge and the BGCI in London.



Photo by Benjamin F. Thacker

Mitchell Kaplan, owner of Books and Books, Dave Barry and Fairchild’s Director Dr. Carl Lewis

DAVE BARRY AT FAIRCHILD

On May 8, Fairchild and Books & Books continued their exciting new partnership with an author event featuring humor writer and Miami icon Dave Barry and his latest book, *I’ll Mature When I’m Dead*. Barry had over 250 guests in hysterics as he highlighted his new book and delighted the crowd with anecdotes from his life and career. Guests had the opportunity to greet Barry and get autographs, as well as enjoy treats courtesy of our generous sponsor, Whole Foods. Look out for more author events at Fairchild this Fall!



GOT STORAGE?

Work and storage space is needed for the Ramble Antiques and Collectibles Committee. If you have an empty cottage, storefront, or office space of about 800 sq. ft., contact Ann Schmidt at 305.667.1651, ext. 3344.

To donate to The Ramble’s famous Antiques & Collectibles Sale, call Dorothy Errera at 305.666.3010. Items of age, distinction and beauty, including art, jewelry, linens, silver, china, ceramics and other collectibles will be greatly appreciated. To donate good quality used and rare books and other media for the Old & Rare Books booth, call Stuart Debenham at 305.665.8572. Pick-ups of all items can be arranged.