Coming out of their shells

Local students are showing their support for an area wildlife crossing while learning valuable lessons in communication and civic action

By Kim McCoy Vann
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

It all started with an article in a community newspaper, Apalachooe Tortoise. When students at Cornerstone Learning Community read about a project that would help wildlife safely cross a busy street, they were spurred to action.

The students want money for the Lake Jackson Ecopassage, an underpass that would help wildlife cross U.S. 27 North. On May 23, the Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency will vote on whether the project should receive $3.5 million in federal funds.

Students at the private school think the decision is obvious. They've visited the site where ecopassage advocate Matt Aresco has safely moved turtles and other wildlife across the road for the past five years. He would have less work to do if the underpass money comes through.

The students have expressed their support by writing letters to Leon County commissioners and letters to the editor in the Talla-hassee Democrat.

"It's a lesson in communication, dialogue, science, civic action and the power of being involved," fourth-grade teacher Jason Flom said. "They started to understand how humans and nature interact."

On Monday, about 50 students in third through eighth grade held a rally in front of the Leon County Courthouse. They carried handmade signs and cheered when drivers honked in support.

Seventh-grader Shelby McKay's sign said: "Got money? Save the turtles."

"The turtles might become endangered since they are getting killed on the highways," Shelby

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said, “They can also hurt people. If you get in a car crash... when the tire hits the turtle, it could fly through the window.”

Fourth-grader Bethany Thomas said people and wildlife have something in common.

“It’s important to me because I don’t like animals dying — more than 1,000 each year,” she said.

“We’re also animals. They’re sharing the habitat with us.”

Fourth-grader Phoebe Scott agreed.

“We need to be kind and respect animals we’re sharing the earth with,” she said.

County Commissioner Bob Rackleff, who said he supports the ecopassage, stopped by the rally. And so did Aresco, who said he appreciates the students’ efforts.

“They understand why it’s an important project for the community, and they are here demonstrating that,” Aresco said of the students.

Other school news

Trinity Catholic School met its goal of collecting 150,000 pennies for tsunami victims. The amount represents the original number of disaster victims. For each penny donated, the students placed a face on a poster collage. Teachers and parents supported students by joining with them to raise $1,500, which was presented to Catholic Relief Services. In addition, community partner Waste Management matched the students’ donations. City and rural letter carriers at the Centerville Road Post Office also joined the project by collecting coins.

Sealey Elementary students are being recognized for their hard work. Sealey congratulates the following Superstars who represented the school at the recent Science Fair Expo: Tyler Gardner, Tiffany Carpenter, Tambari Piawah, Olivia Odom, Darian Colbert, Justin Countryman, Jeffrey Clark, Savanna Lyle, Jonathan Nelson and Cristian Rivera. In addition, Florida A&M University’s Environmental Institute presented awards to Sealey’s third, fourth- and fifth-graders who participated in the Environmental Poster Contest. Fifteen blue, red and yellow ribbons were presented as well as 45 honorable-

Elizabeth Clark, Colleen Cowdry, Jonathan Enlow, Katelyn Harrison, Joseph Kalicki, Riley McCord, John McLeod, Elizabeth Odom, Alexandra Scannone, Phillip Schlenoff and Laura Whitehouse will participate in TIP’s State Recognition Ceremony at Florida State University, also on May 23. These students scored a 510 or better on either the SAT math or verbal sections, or scored at least 500 on both sections of the exam.

Buck Lake Elementary teachers Betty Rinehart and Susan Teel were recognized as Innovation Sustainers at the 15th annual Project CHILD Conference held in Orlando. The Institute for School Innovation recognizes exemplary educators who have reached the milestone of having been CHILD teachers for 10 years. Rinehart has been a CHILD teacher for 13 years, and Teel for 10 years.

Fifteen Buck Lake Elementary teachers and support staff “took the fight into the night” to raise money to find a cure for cancer on May 6. Buck Lake’s team, the SF15ers, were one of over 100 teams that participated in the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life held at the Leon County Fairgrounds. As a result of the joint effort between parents, students, teachers, support staff, and community members, the Buck Lake SF15ers contributed nearly $17,000 to the cause. The team earned the Devante Kennedy Award for the second year in a row. It recognizes the school that raises the most money.

Sealey Elementary will host its annual Young Authors’ Conference on Wednesday. K-5 students will read stories they have written to local published authors and community members. This year’s guest speaker is Julianna Baggott, author of “The Anybody” and “The Nobodies.” Her pen name is N.E. Bode.

Students in the SSTRIDE - Science, Students Together Reaching Instructional Diversity and Excellence — an outreach program developed by the Florida State University College of Medicine were recently honored for their creativity. The program hopes to produce physicians and other medical professionals who will stay and practice in Florida’s rural and inner-city communities.

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