

National News

Local educators tout benefits of LOF/BREEF marine conservation workshop

By THEA RUTHERFORD

Guardian National Correspondent ~ thea@nasguard.com

Teachers who participated in an international ocean conservation initiative piloted in The Bahamas recently called the event, among other things, an "awesome experience."

The Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation (BREEF) partnered with the Living Oceans Foundation (LOF) and the Harvard Medical School Center for Health and the Global Environment, to present a series of educational outreach programs for teachers and students in The Bahamas from April 30 to May 2.

Educators from the organizations took teachers on a snorkeling expedition, gave College of The Bahamas students an underwater scuba diving lecture and gave presentations at C. V. Bethel Senior High and S. C. McPherson Junior High schools, in addition to the weekend workshop.

The program was the first step in the Living Oceans Foundation's expedition around the world to raise awareness about threats to the marine environment, particularly the deterioration of coral reefs.

"We wanted to connect with local organizations and local educators to go through what the state of the reefs are globally. And also in The Bahamas, to inform [educators] on how to incorporate all of this new science into their own work," said Melinda Harrison, executive assistant at the Living Oceans Foundation, based outside of Washington D.C.

One of the organization's major goals, and one it shares with local group BREEF, is to translate scientific findings on the state of the marine environment into everyday language for the public. The group has done research in countries around the world

through invitations by local governments and organizations.

"My passion for the conservation of the natural environments of The Bahamas made the various aspects of the Workshop both interesting and informative," said Michael Brooks, a teacher at the North Andros High School.

"Captain Philip Renaud, Dr. Andrew Bruckner, and the team from the Prince Khaled bin Sultan Living Oceans Foundation shared critical information about coral reefs, as well as innovative techniques for sharing it with students and the wider Bahamian community."

The educational resources shared with the group during the workshop are those that officials at BREEF plan to use in that organization's own annual workshops. Environmental educator, Charlene Carey, said that BREEF would be using videos and powerpoint presentations from the LOF workshop during its teacher workshop in San Salvador from July 11 - 18.

"We look forward to and benefit from partnerships with international organizations," said Carey.

"The workshop was just the right balance," she said. "All of the teachers who were there have a good understanding of coral reefs. They were able to go just a bit more so that they can get an even further understanding."

Kathleen Frith, assistant director at the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School, was one of the workshop's facilitators. Frith and filmmaker Jennifer Galvin, joined together to create a bridge between LOF and BREEF to bring about the workshop. Galvin filmed "Free Swim," a documentary on Eleutherans

who learned to swim through the Swim to Empower program brought to that island by Brenna Hughes in 2005.

"The mission of the Center is to help people understand that to protect our own health we have to protect the natural world," said Frith, drawing connections between the center's mission and the similar missions of the other organizations involved in the workshop. Frith has traveled around the world to teach at other such workshops.

"We depend on the environment for our human health, and if we degrade the natural environment, ultimately we're harming our health."

Even more enthused about what they learned about the marine environment, the teachers who participated in the workshop expressed the desire to continue to spread the message to their students and others.

St. Andrew's teacher, Hilary Lockhart, shared the film "Once Upon a Tide," produced by the Center for Health and the Global Environment, and screened in the workshop, to her students.

"The children loved it, and afterwards wrote 'Thank you' letters to the ocean, which was an activity that was introduced to us by Kathleen Frith at the workshop," she reported.

"The Living Ocean Foundation workshop was an awesome experience," said Nicola Williams, a teacher at S. C. McPherson.

"When you are exposed to the effects of how man is destroying this crucial ecosystem, it only stimulates you to become an advocate to preserve what we have for future generations to enjoy."



■ From left (standing) are Hilary Lockhart (St. Andrews School), Michael Brooks (North Andros High); Coel Thompson (C.V. Bethel Senior High School), Shelley Cant (Bahamas National Trust), Carol Edwards (St. Augustine's College), Nicola Williams (S.C. McPherson Junior High School), Pearlene Baker (Government High School), Charlene Carey (BREEF), Jackie Chisholm-Lightbourne (College of The Bahamas), Michelle Bailey (Central Abaco High), Casurina McKinney-Lambert (BREEF), and Finley Lambert. In the front row (from left) are Andrew Bruckner (Living Oceans Foundation), Jennifer Galvin (reelblue, LLC), Kathleen Frith (Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School), Phillip Renaud (Living Oceans Foundation), Amanda Williams (Living Oceans Foundation), and Melinda Harrison (Living Oceans Foundation).

Photos courtesy KATHLEEN FRITH