



Soaking up science

Hands-on exhibits enlighten children at annual event

By Laura Patz - Staff Writer

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Sharks, snakes and whale fossils grabbed the attention of more than 2,000 kindergarten through eighth grade students who visited the PMAC Thursday.

The children came with hundreds of teachers and chaperons from public, private and home schools to participate in Ocean Commotion.

Ocean Commotion is an annual event University Relations hosts. Louisiana Sea Grant College Program also hosted the event this year.

This was the fifth year for the event but only its second year in the PMAC.

"We teach kids to be good stewards of the environment," said Robin Dunkin, University Relations marketing coordinator and Ocean Commotion co-coordinator. "They learn how to take care of the coast, not dump gas or oil into their own backyards because it does get into our water system. It's pretty exciting for a lot of them because it's many of their first times to see something like this."

Several different University and local organizations, including the Louisiana Coast Guard, the LSU Rural Life Museum, Louisiana Public Broadcasting and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, participated in the event by setting up display tables for children to enjoy.

The LSU Museum of Natural Science carefully brought a plastic replica of one of its most prized possessions to the PMAC to show the children.

Sophie Warny, museum education director, and her team displayed the fossilized bones of a Basilosaurus, a member of the extinct group of ancient whales.

"It's pretty neat for them to know that [the fossil] is 60 feet long," Warny said. "That's like 20 kindergartners holding hands."

The Basilosaurus' bones actually were found here in Louisiana, and the museum has had the fossil in its possession for a number of years.

Children of a variety of ages enjoyed each of the unique displays.

One table featured an activity titled "Who Made this Poo?" where children looked at the dung of several different animals and decided what kind of animal made each one.

Several University students and some secondary school students volunteered at different booths.

"A lot of student organizations on campus volunteer their time to help out with this," Dunkin said. "We could not do it without student volunteers. They help a great deal."

Jennifer Spicer, an oceanography graduate student, and Gabe Johnson, a biology senior, volunteered at the table sponsored by the LSU Coastal Fisheries Institute and the University geography and anthropology department.



KEVIN GADDIS JR. / The Reveille
A 'TURTLE' EXPERIENCE: A student from Trinity Elementary School crawls through the Turtle Excluder Device, an instrument designed to keep shrimpers from trapping turtles in their nets. This device was one of

The display consisted of pictures and information about sharks. Its purpose was to dispel common myths about sharks and inform students what scientists are doing to better understand the animals.

"Some kids are interested, some are scared and some are disgusted," Johnson said. "It's cool for most of them."

Overall, students' reactions to the exhibits seemed very positive.

"We tell [exhibitors] to provide a hands-on, minds-on kind of booth, where the children can touch things and engage their brains in that kind of stuff," Dunkin said.

Many teachers from the participating secondary schools incorporated the information kids would learn at Ocean Commotion into their lesson plans prior to the event.

"Many of the kids are coming here looking for something specific that they want to report on," Dunkin said.

St. Joseph's Academy and Harry Hurst Middle School had their own student-run booths at the event.

The event was beneficial both to the participating students and to the University, Dunkin said.

"Another good thing about Ocean Commotion is that it brings young students on campus and gets in their minds that maybe they want to come to LSU," Dunkin said. "For the older crowd, it's good because they actually get to talk to LSU professors, graduate students and students about what they're studying and what they're doing. It's a way to totally expose the kids to the University."

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