

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Boys & Girls Clubs help keep the sea free of debris

Marissa Kappus

Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County

PORT ST. LUCIE – Throughout the last two summers, Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County partnered with Florida Atlantic University Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (FAU Harbor Branch) to provide programming for teens that focuses on the harmful effects of marine debris while empowering young adults to become advocates for the ocean and their communities. In this time, 18,803 pieces, or 1,569 pounds, of trash were collected and removed from local St. Lucie County beaches.

Each week-long camp was structured so that teens spent time learning about marine debris and impacts on the environment before visiting various waterfront sites. There, the teens collected and sorted trash while recording data that they later submitted to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA.) The week closed with St. Lucie County Solid Waste Division teaching the teens about recycling and getting their Clubs set up with their very own recycling station.

“Through this partnership, we are not only training the next generation of marine scientists, but we are also educating our community and cleaning up local waterways,” said Dr. Gabrielle Barbarite, FAU Harbor Branch director of Outreach & Engagement. “Over the past two years, 250 Junior Ambassadors made an incredible impact on St. Lucie County beaches.”

In addition to their hands-on work in the community, these teen ambassadors created six ocean-themed art pieces using the trash they collected. The sea creature scaffolds were provided by the St. Lucie County Environmental Resources Department and were designed using upcycled materials. These sculptures will be debuted at the Indian River Lagoon Science Festival on Oct. 22, then displayed around the county.

“Boys & Girls Clubs strives to provide the highest level of life-enriching educational experiences for our Club members by partnering with experts in their field such as FAU Harbor Branch,” said



Here, a youngster stands by one of the art projects that members made with materials collected from local beaches in partnership with Oxbow Eco-Center.



Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County members taking part in an activity where they search for debris in buckets of sand. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARYANN KETCHAM



Dr. Gabrielle Barbarite, Laura Issac, Josephine Story, Katelyn Digirolomo and Tommy John help "Keep the Sea Free of Debris."

Will Armstead, CEO. “These teens are now conservation Ambassadors — ready to advocate for reducing ocean pollution.”



St. Lucie County Environmental Resources showing Boys & Girls Club members their completed jellyfish art project made with marine debris collected from local beaches.