

The Suncoast Youth Conservation Center In Apollo Beach Will Inspire Young And Old

By Kathy Collins - November 9, 2016

By Kathy L. Collins

Situated on land that has been restored to its natural habitat, the Suncoast Youth Conservation Center (SYCC) in Apollo Beach is a great place to get students and people of all ages to reconnect with



nature. The SYCC is a collaborative effort between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), TECO and the Florida Aquarium. The land that the SYCC sits on is owned by TECO and is adjacent to the Manatee Viewing Center.

The 6000 sq. ft. building was built on stilts to provide for both indoor and outdoor classroom space. The SYCC provides an exciting learning opportunity for students. They also get to participate in recreational activities such as kayaking and walking nature trails in and around Newman's Branch Creek.

A recent visit to the SYCC, and a great conversation with the center director, Dr. Kathy Guindon, made me wish I was in school again. Guindon comes to the center after spending 20 years as a fisheries research biologist. She has been with the center for two years.

"The SYCC is the first FWC facility to educate youth with a hands-on curriculum about marine science as it pertains to Tampa Bay," explained Guindon. The field trips are geared for students in grades three through 12 and are available to any school in Hillsborough County as well as to groups such as Girl Scouts. It is free. The school or organization needs to only provide transportation, and all visits must be pre-arranged. In addition to field trips, the SYCC offers summer day camps for students in grades three through eight.

This is a fun and cool way to learn about the environment and the natural habitat of Tampa Bay. As you view the property from the large outside porch of the center, you can see the saltwater marsh that was restored by volunteers who literally planted plants that will be used to help restore other areas of Tampa Bay.

"I am a kid at heart, and it is easy to get excited and passionate about this place," said Guindon. Her excitement is palpable and the depth and breadth of her knowledge about all things nature is wonderful.

The SYCC is the first of five phases to be completed. Work is ongoing on the second phase which includes a kayak pole barn, sea turtle rehabilitation hospital and public restrooms.

The SYCC is located at 505 Estuary Shore Lane in Apollo Beach. Visit www.fyccn.com/suncoast.

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