

North Live Oak Elementary students work to “Save the Honey Bee”

Their efforts could win \$18,000 for their school and a trip to Disney.

Do you like almonds and strawberries, chocolate or blueberries? Well, all of these, plus over ninety others, depend on honey bees for pollination! Did you know that the honey bees are disappearing? The fourth graders at North Live Oak Elementary do! The forty students that comprise Mrs. Vellier and Mrs. Hastings’s fourth grade class are involved in Disney’s Planet Challenge. This program is a free, project-based, environmentally-focused, national competition. It is a unique chance for teachers to blend standards-based content, critical thinking skills, and environmental principles in a class project that moves students from awareness to action for a positive impact on their community. Our project has turned into our passion!

The students have been involved in many projects in which they are helping to save the honey bees. The students used computers, dictionaries, and books to learn as much as possible about the honey bees. We even got to meet Louisiana’s Chief Bee Inspector, Mr. Allen Fabre! He brought his equipment for collecting samples of honey bees, as well as showed us varro mite specimens! These are predators of the honey bees. We learned ways the state was trying to control the mite population.

Together, with the help of their parents, the students have built solitary bee boxes after school. These boxes have been placed in the community to provide a habitat for solitary bees. Solitary bees make up 30% of the bee species. On weekends, they have worked to construct a greenhouse to grow sunflower seeds. The seeds will be tended to by the students, and then planted in the community to provide nectar and habitats for the honey bees! The students designed a logo that depicts a honey bee with a fleur-de-lis, and turned these into project tee shirts. The tee shirts were sold school-wide. The profit made will be used to create a specialty Louisiana license plate. The Louisiana Bee Association will team up with the students to fund the \$3,500.00 it takes to get plates made. The students have also teamed up with State Representative-elect, Valarie Hodges, to draft and get a bill passed. We are thankful for the help that Commissioner, Dr. Mike Strain DVM, offered when he learned of our license plate project. We are learning so much about the government! The students also traveled to Hammond on January 3 to persuade Mayor Foster to adopt the Louisiana Bee Ordinance that will allow beekeepers to keep bees in the city! We were able to present before the city council members, and inform them of the importance of honey bees! They agreed to adopt the model ordinance and allow beekeeping in the city, which had been banned since 1952. Students interested in being future teachers created 30 minute lessons that they taught to younger grades. The students are currently planning our 100th day of school bee celebration. Many educational and fun activities have been planned for this day. Students and teachers will be dressing as bees on this day, learning about the importance of honey bees, trying foods made with honey, playing educational games, and learning about ways they can help save the honey bees.

We have fallen in love with the honey bee and learned many valuable lessons. We have learned how government works, how to work in cooperative groups, how to have our voices heard, and how hard work and action can help save the planet! It is our responsibility!