

Good News: Teen boaters help clean up the Caloosahatchee

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Dec. 15

news-press.com

About the Quality Life Center

Quality Life Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working toward personal and community transformation by developing the potential of under-served populations in southwest Florida with after-school, summer camp and adult job development training. The Edison Sailing Center is devoted to the instruction and promotion of sailing in southwest Florida. Located on the Caloosahatchee River, the Center teaches children the fundamentals of sailing and how to safely operate motorboats.

A visit to a Lee County commissioners meeting resulted in an effort to clean parts of the Caloosahatchee River by youth at the Quality Life Center in Dunbar.

Teenagers in the center's Leaders in Training of Excellence program attended the commissioners meeting to watch a discussion of funding youth programs. The officials discussed, and rejected, using Conservation 20/20 funds.

However, that discussion piqued the teens interest, said Shari Williams, public relations director for the center, and they began looking for a way to help the environment.

With the help of Ross Webb, director of the Edison Sailing Center, the LITE program participants found a way.

Webb said the sailing center has been working with the Quality Life Center for the past two years, providing boating opportunities by teaching students to kayak, sail and powerboat.

"I love the program over there," Webb said. "They are proud of what they do."

Webb said that trash was becoming a problem on several of the islands in the Caloosahatchee.

"We really had tons of trash out there," he said. "And the kids are always asking what they can do to help."

Webb said the kids got in kayaks and boats and paddled out to the islands to help pick up rubbish, litter and lots of discarded materials.

"We got about 200 pounds of stuff," he said.

Khadijah Ashley, 13, and Tyrese Davis, 14, are LITE members who went on the litter pickup.

"At first it was cool, I had never been over there," Davis said of the island hop. "I got angry because there was a lot of trash. People should have to clean it up themselves."

Ashley said the cleanup was enjoyable. "It was fun. I like to clean up the community," she said, adding that, at first she was a bit apprehensive of kayaking on the river but Webb and others helped guide her.

"I would do it again," she said.

Amari Tucker, Khamani Griffin and Evan Blake, all 10, are students at the Quality Life Center

who were guided by the LITE teens for the cleanup.

“We found more than 100 beer cans,” said Evan. “I also found an old crab trap.”

“We found cigarettes, tampons and a cracked alligator egg,” said Amari. “And an old wine bottle with wine still in it.”

Khamani said she, too, was a bit apprehensive about being on the water. “I learned about kayaking and to never be afraid of what’s in the water.”

Some of the LITE teenagers are also in the sailing program at the sailing center.

Davis has been learning powerboating, which helped during the cleanup since he was allowed to pilot one of the boats under supervision. “I had to make sure I was going the right speed, it was cool,” he said.

Williams said Davis has done well in both programs. “Tyrese has made huge gains since he’s been part of the program,” she said.

Webb said the youths did exceptional.

“Nobody gave up. They kayaked out there and to the other island,” he said. “One little girl was in a kayak and she was crying, but she refused help and made it back all by herself. They did really well and tried really hard.”