



NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

NEW RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS “CONNECTING TO THE OCEANS” THROUGH BIRCH STATE PARK PROGRAM

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. - March 6, 2014 - As part of their participation in the 20th annual Wheelabrator Symposium for Environment and Education, New River Middle School science students are determining whether the water that finds its way to the Atlantic Ocean from Hugh Taylor Birch State Park is acceptable for the marine habitat. About 30 students, who have been collecting water and analyzing data for several months, will visit the park **Wednesday, March 12 at 11:30 a.m.** to continue their efforts.

The New River student team is one of 15 participating in the Symposium. Under educators' guidance and with the resources and support of renewable energy provider Wheelabrator Technologies and the local community, the student teams identify an environmental issue in their communities. Over the course of the school year, students research, develop and implement long-term solutions to these issues, working with their teachers and Wheelabrator employee-volunteers.

“The Wheelabrator Symposium is so valuable because it encourages my students to go beyond the text books and learn out in the field,” said New River science teacher and Wheelabrator Symposium advisor Barbara Rapoza. “These aren’t just mock projects. Working with Wheelabrator employees, we’re making a real difference in our community.”

The New River Middle School project is also part of a Florida Department of Environmental Protection statewide program called Learning in Florida’s Environment (LIFE). Rapoza said her school was the first in South Florida selected to participate in LIFE due, in large part, to its previous Wheelabrator Symposium efforts. Last year, Rapoza’s students planted thousands of sea oats along Broward County beaches to maintain the coastline and sea turtle habitats.

A team of 10 New River Middle School students will gather in Sunrise, Fla. May 5-8 for the Wheelabrator Symposium, joining 14 other participating student teams from schools across the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Florida regions. At the

Symposium, the students will present their projects and solutions to peers and a panel of partners comprised of educators, government officials and other community volunteers.

Other Broward County schools participating in this year's Symposium are Sawgrass Springs Middle School in Coral Springs, Westglades Middle School in Parkland and McNicol Middle School in Hollywood.

"Our commitment to sustainability really goes beyond our day-to-day operations, and for 20 years the Symposium has been the cornerstone of our efforts to help build sustainable communities and inspire the next generation of environmental leaders," said Peter Kendrigan, Wheelabrator's southern regional vice president. "The dedication these students display to the environment is truly remarkable, and we are honored to celebrate the Symposium's 20th anniversary with them."

This year, the Wheelabrator Symposium is focusing on the theme of "Connecting to the Oceans" via a special educational partnership with third-generation ocean explorer Fabien Cousteau, first grandson of legendary explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Student teams must look at how their sustainability projects have a much larger environmental impact that goes beyond their own local communities, and they must demonstrate the connection between their environmental efforts and the oceans.

This year, students will follow Cousteau and his team during Mission 31, a month-long research mission in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary aboard Aquarius, the only underwater marine habitat and lab in the world. Students will also be able to participate in online science sessions on ocean conservation led by renowned scientists. Cousteau will be the keynote speaker at the Symposium's 20th anniversary celebration in May.

Wheelabrator provides each participating school with \$500 in start-up funds and then a \$1,000 donation at the conclusion of the event. In addition, students can later qualify to earn a scholarship through Wheelabrator's partnership with Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn.

The Double Tree by Hilton Hotel Sunrise - Sawgrass Mills is a partner sponsor of the Symposium event, providing the accommodations for the anniversary celebration.

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