

ST. THOMAS SOURCE

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Reef Fest Teaches Community and Visitors About Marine Environment

[1] Hundreds of community members and tourists turned out Saturday to learn about environmental conservation at the seventh annual Reef Fest.

Held at Coral World Ocean Park on St. Thomas, the free educational festival featured environmental science presentations, marine life exhibits, raffle prize giveaways and live music.

Attendees learned about a myriad of topics, including the dangers of microplastics and invasive lionfish, which they had the chance to sample through a live cooking demonstration.

Scientific concepts such as blue carbon were also part of the program. As opposed to green carbon, which is stored in forests, blue carbon is absorbed and stored by coastal and ocean ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrass beds.

About 25 booth exhibits from local schools and community groups were displayed. Students from Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School, Addelita Cancryn Junior High School and Lockhart Elementary School were among the presenters, as were representatives from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the Caribbean Oceanic Restoration Education Foundation.

Students from Addelita Cancryn used recycled items to create an aquarium display with tropical marine life. Eighth graders Maya Quetel, Tyron Monsanto, Breanni Perkins, Vashley Gumbs and Joshua Embrack all said they learned about the importance of recycling and why people should keep trash out of the ocean.

“Fish can eat the trash and then we eat the fish, which can make us sick,” Perkins said.

[2] According to Coral World marketing director Valerie Peters, the event usually draws between 800 and 1,000 people. She said she was surprised by how many people had turned out early in the day.





“Overall, we hope everyone who comes out leaves with a better understanding of the difference they can make in the marine environment,” Peters said.

While the event aims to educate on a variety of marine conservation issues, this year’s focus was marine debris – improperly disposed of trash that intentionally or unintentionally ends up in the ocean.

Howard Forbes Jr., St. Thomas coordinator for the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service, said it was a fitting year to focus on marine debris.

“We’re honing in specifically on marine debris given the legislature just banned plastic bags, which will be effective in January,” Forbes said.

[3]Forbes added that “We hope that everyone learns about the issue of trash in the territory and that people take responsibility to address it and stop pointing fingers.”

Reef Fest raises funds for the V.I. Marine Advisory Service, which works to bring awareness to marine resources and environmental issues, and Blue Flag USVI, a program that gives environmental awards to beaches and marinas that work to meet sustainability standards.

Forbes said the event also raises funds to help infuse an educational model, known as Eco-Schools, into the territory. Eco-Schools is the world’s largest environmental education program. The model incorporates environmental education into every subject area to reinforce the importance of ecosystem conservation.



Sponsors of the fundraiser raffle include Mahogany Run Golf Course, Bolongo Bay Resort, Tree Limin Extreme, Paradise Point, Marriott Frenchman’s Reef, Wyndham Resort, Media Marketing, Debbie’s Dedicated Dogs, Coki Beach Dive, East End Flower Shop, Magens Bay Authority, Seaborne Airlines, Pistarckle Theater, St. Thomas Restaurant Group, Top Sail, Forever Flower, Diamonds International, Calypso and Bad Kitty, Sally George, Yak Shak at Magens Bay, Scoops N Brew, Virgin Snow Shave Ice, Hooters, Adventure Center, Caribbean Mermaid Academy, Walgreens, and Coral World Ocean Park.

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