

Local students organize conservation-themed expo

When McNicol Middle Science teacher Lara Ruddy and her students found out there wasn't going to be a Wheelabrator Environmental Symposium, they decided to organize one of their own.

The Hollywood school welcomed Crystal Lake and Westglades Middle for the first S.O.S. for the Earth at Florida Atlantic University's Davie Campus. The event gave students the chance to present projects they've been working on to a panel of experts including professors.

A Green Expo followed, where the young environmental crusaders stood at tables to further explain their work. Also in attendance were representatives from the Everglades Foundation, Broward County Sea Turtle Conservation, and Wacky Wild Science.

Ruddy, whose school has an active G.A.I.A. (Grow Awareness In All) club, is happy with the response and proud of the effort from the participants. The kids knew their topics well.

"It has gone better than

I could have imagined," she said. "FAU really took this on and really supported us. We are hoping it becomes an annual thing."

The McNicol group spoke about plastic pollution and how the material can be reused rather than just thrown away. The students also showed how old shirts can be transformed into a reusable bag. Sixth grader Jocelyn Montes was happy to be able to demonstrate what they learned to an audience.

"I've always had a pas-

sion for science," she said. "A major part of this was research before we did anything."

Westglades students delved into what they've been doing by maintaining their butterfly garden and improving the habitat. The students invited attendees to see some of their caterpillars and the species they helped cultivate.

"I've been a big nature geek all my life, so this has extended my experience," said seventh grade student Anna Crean. "We have really beautified our

school. I think we have really made it a better place. We have even helped with a butterfly garden at our local Heron Heights Elementary."

Crystal Lake Middle students explained their efforts with urban gardening and the Crystal Lake pine scrub. They recently hosted a cleanup for the habitat near the school and had photos on display.

"It's this dry sandy ecosystem and home to a variety of species," eighth grade student Benjamin Rivera said. "So it's important to take care of it. This

is the first time I've really done anything extracurricular. I'm glad I did."

Their classmate Sarah Mellinger was glad to help bring environmental issues to the forefront.

"It was really interesting to look at everyone else's presentations," she said. "We are all playing a role in making a difference. I was excited to be up there and talk about something I'm really passionate about. It was also eye-opening to see how big impact we together are having."