

A circular logo in shades of green. The top arc contains the word "WATER" and the bottom arc contains "PROTECTOR". The center features a stylized water drop with a leaf inside. Small text around the inner edge includes "KEEP IT CLEAN", "TELL THE TRUTH", and "DON'T TAKE THE NAME".

**RAISING
WATER
PROTECTOR**

RAISING WATER PROTECTORS



Over the past 50 years we have seen Florida's environment degraded to the point where it is no longer safe to go to the beaches, springs, lakes and rivers because of fear of toxic blue-green algae, flesh eating bacteria, and raw sewage. It's obvious that politicians are putting special interests before the environment and that this issue of pollution is not being addressed.

Raising Water Protectors is a grass roots effort to teach our children about the environment because if they don't know it, they won't protect it, they won't fight for it. I developed a passion for nature as a youngster through what I learned in school and scouting. As an adult, I write and perform songs and stories to create an awareness of our precious environment. One of my songs inspired others to create a program that was implemented throughout their school.

Rollin' On Our Rivers was a year-long, school-wide program at Jacksonville's Fishweir Elementary School in 2005-2006. All students (PK-5) learned about Florida's waterways and how they impact the flora and fauna and ultimately the lives of all who call Florida home. The inspiration for this comprehensive study was my award-winning song, *The Lullaby of the Rivers*. This song references fourteen Florida rivers with Native American names, such as Oklawaha, Ichetuchnee, Econfinia, and Withlacoochee.

Teachers began the school year with prominent displays in the auditorium, library and front hall to kick off the Rolling On Our Rivers theme. Rowboats, fishnets, alligators, fishing poles, lanterns, turtles and palmetto fronds adorned the school. Twenty Florida rivers were selected for the program, including the fourteen named in the song plus six others because of their

proximity or special interest. After listening to the song *Lullaby of the Rivers* and receiving the lyrics, each classroom teacher drew the name of one of these Florida rivers. In order to integrate the program with Sunshine State Standards, students studied different aspects of their river throughout the year. Each month, all classes studied the same topic, for example in November all classes focused on the mammals in and along their river.

Classroom teachers developed lessons and activities to enhance and support the monthly river-related topics. Research projects and responses to river-related literature were displayed in the halls and in the classrooms. The Book of the Month was selected to help further students' understanding and appreciation of the monthly river topic, as well as to foster school community and culture. For example the book for November was *The Realm of the Panther*. A bulletin board displayed the name of the river-related monthly Book of the Month along with pictures to match.

The traditional school assembly held on the first Friday of each month was the setting for grade levels to share the information they had learned about their river during the previous month. The assemblies included opportunities for students to report about their rivers, as well as time to sing about rivers. The assemblies included the entire student population and built background knowledge about rivers. *Rollin' On Our Rivers* developed an unmistakable common culture in the school.

As a visual and performing arts magnet school, the art and music teachers planned their lessons to include the river studies. Students explored their talents through art, music, creative writing and drama and used this environmental study as a backdrop for their creativity.

The art teacher connected the art lessons to each monthly topic of study. Students used a variety of mixed medium that included tempera, cut paper and fabric to create every imaginable river

animal. For example in January our monthly topic came alive with mosaics, swamp murals, painted lizards, alligators and fish. The student artwork was displayed in the hallways and classrooms and changed monthly.

The performing arts teachers correlated their instruction with the program. The music teachers taught all students songs about rivers that included *Lullaby of the Rivers*, *Peace Like a River*, and *Listen to the Water*. The dance teacher taught her students to dance to the songs *Moon River* and *Up a Lazy River*. The drama teacher coached his students in the theatrical vignette, "Polly the (River) Pirate". The band featured *Rhapsody in Blue* and *The Blue Danube*.

As a culmination to the year-long study, the magnet department produced "Celebrating Our Rivers" to showcase the talents of the students. Band, chorus, drama and dance students performed at two evening performances. I was invited to visit the campus as a surprise for the students and teachers and performed my original composition, *Lullaby of the Rivers*, the inspiration for the project.

New understandings and appreciation for the unique river ecosystems and habitats for wildlife were evident everywhere in the proliferation of student artwork as well as the research projects and responses to literature. The *Rollin' On Our Rivers* program was subsequently recognized by the Florida Association of School Administrators when they granted the school a "Little Red Schoolhouse Award", a prestigious award given for programs that make education for students engaging, challenging and meaningful experiences. This award recognizes schools with exemplary initiatives, efforts, or accomplishments.

The *Raising Water Protectors* project intends to replicate the success at Fishweir Elementary School by providing a model for other schools and groups to use to educate children about the importance of nature. The project will provide a high quality

instructional DVD and written resources that we would distribute to anyone willing to implement the program. People are becoming more and more aware of the degradation of water and the environment, but they don't know what to do to fix it. *Raising Water Protectors* gives them an answer, it starts by educating our children. This pilot program would be applicable not just in Florida but anywhere and with any group of rivers, and for any group that cares about the environment.

January 2020
Bob Patterson
bobpatterson165@gmail.com
904/ 315-9957

