



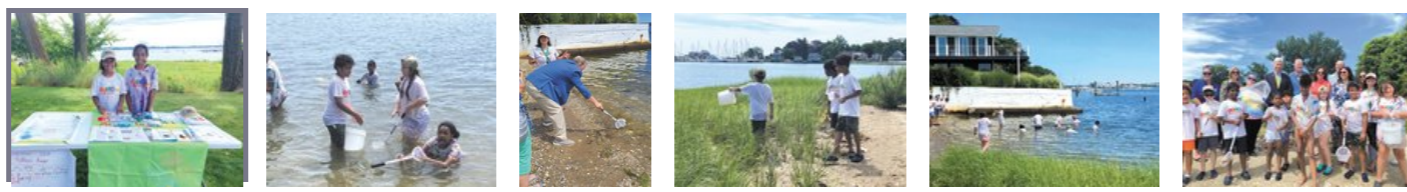
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A little exploration can go a long way

STEM Advantage campers learn about the environment at Stillhouse Cove



KEEP THE COVE CLEAN: (From left) Jealy Balbuena, who attends Gladstone Elementary School, and Jaelyn Morales, who attends Park View Middle School, sold key chains and bookmarks on Friday to raise funds for Stillhouse Cove to keep the area clean. (Herald photo)



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By **EMMA BARTLETT**

Silversides, clams and crabs were some of the many creatures STEM Advantage campers found Friday morning at Stillhouse Cove during their field study. Twenty kids between third and sixth grade eagerly explored the water, shoreline and grass area – running around and showing their friends the large clumps of seaweed and shells they found.

Caitlyn Blankenship, statewide coordinator for STEM Advantage RI, said campers visited Stillhouse Cove to learn how to be environmental stewards while advancing their knowledge on aquatic research. Campers took water samples to test the cove's Ph levels, oxygen and turbidity.

Local and state officials including Mayor Ken Hopkins, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and council members Lammi Vargas, Jessica Marino and John Donegan stopped by Stillhouse Cove along with representatives from United Way, YMCA and the Edgewood Waterfront Preservation Association (EWPA).

Camper Charlie Wrenn, 10, from Edgewood Highlands Elementary School liked going in the water and to find fish on Friday; he said the group found lots of seashells. Meanwhile, Ritwik Katta, 9, of Woodridge Elementary School added that he found a lot of seaweed while Samridh Kishan, 9, of Orchard Farms Elementary School liked how the tides changed over time.

In addition to learning how to identify oysters, scallops, mussels and quahogs on Friday, campers identified birds and insects and implemented a clean up group that picked up litter by the cove.

Two campers – Jaelyn Morales, who attends Park View Middle School, and Jealy Balbuena, who attends Gladstone Elementary School – sold blue and green beaded key chains and book markers that they made at camp to raise money for Stillhouse Cove.

EWPA board member Donna Fieldman said by learning about nature from an early age, kids will have an appreciation for the area while also understanding ecology and what affects marshlands and sea creatures.

EWPA – which was started by Barabra Rubine – is an organization that maintains the park and salt marsh and park to make it accessible for kids and families. EWPA hosts two major clean ups each year as well as smaller clean ups throughout the year.

Funding for the Summer Learning Initiative (SLI) and the STEM Advantage RI Program comes from United Way and the Rhode Island Foundation. Blankenship highlighted community partners include the YMCA, Ocean State Kids Club, Mystic Aquarium and others.

"I love STEM education," said Whitehouse. "It's such an important part of kids' development."

President and CEO of United Way of Rhode Island Cortney Nicolato said that the summer learning initiative is held in five communities across the state. In addition to Cranston, Woonsocket, Central Falls, Newport and Westerly all have summer learning programs. She said there are about 50,000 additional kids who still need to have an opportunity like this available to them.

"I see their bright eyes and excitement and desire to learn and that's what we want to do in our summer learning programs is help, support and fund organizations who are doing great things," said Nicolato.

She said exploring helps reduce that learning loss and kids learn civic responsibility, leadership responsibility and become mentors.

Martene Guay from United Way of Rhode Island added that school is the "what" while summer is the "why." While students are learning things in the classroom during the school year, the summer is their time to explore first hand.

Keywords

camp, Stillhouse Cove

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