



November 15, 2023

For the very first time, the YMCA had the privilege of hosting an environmental summer camp in Matagorda County. The introduction of the YMCA-Palacios camp was met with enthusiasm and excitement, as it represented an important educational and recreational addition to the region. This groundbreaking initiative was not just an ordinary summer camp; it was an opportunity for local youth to embark on a journey of exploration, discovery, and environmental awareness. Through a diverse array of activities such as fishing, kayaking, ecological studies, wildlife encounters, hands-on activities, and interactive science experiments, participants gained a profound understanding of their local environment. The camp not only provided a platform for young minds to explore, learn and grow, but also promoted environmental stewardship and sustainable living practices, ensuring that the profound impact of this camp extended far beyond its duration.

On the initial day of the camp, all campers received water safety instruction at the Palacios Pool. Additionally, campers received instruction on science laboratory safety protocols in accordance with school standards.

Notable moments of the camp included trips to Palacios Marine Agricultural Research and the Palacios Marine Education Center, where campers learned all about oyster mariculture and various ecological processes that are vital to the delicate balance of coastal ecosystems. Through hands-on experiences and engaging activities, they gained a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness of the environment and how their actions can have a positive impact on preserving our precious natural resources.

Campers also visited Turtle Creek Aquaculture, a local red fish farm in Palacios. Here the kids learned about the life cycle of redfish, the significance of maintaining water quality, and the innovative techniques used in aquaculture to minimize environmental impact. A trip to Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson further enriched the campers' understanding of aquatic ecosystems and conservation efforts. At Sea Center Texas, the campers were immersed in a world of marine life, gaining insights into the breeding and restocking programs for various fish species. They had the unique opportunity to witness the intricate process of hatching and raising fish in controlled environments, emphasizing the importance of sustaining healthy populations in our waterways.

Other memorable trips included fishing and crabbing at LCRA Park in Matagorda where campers experienced seeing the Gulf of Mexico for the first time. Education on angler techniques and safety measures was provided to ensure that all participants gained the knowledge and skills necessary to enjoy fishing responsibly and securely.

Campers thoroughly relished their visit to the Texas State Aquarium, where they embarked on an exciting journey through marine wonders. Exploring the aquarium's captivating exhibits, they encountered a diverse array of marine life, from colorful coral reefs teeming with fish to majestic sea turtles and playful dolphins. This visit sparked a sense of wonder and curiosity, fostering a profound connection between the campers and the marine world. It not only provided an unforgettable

educational experience but also inspired a commitment to preserving and cherishing the rich coastal environments of Texas.

Paddling along the serene waters of Lake Texana in kayaks and embarking on an adventure through Brackenridge Park, campers also had the chance to visit the Educational Center, where they delved into the world of reptiles and amphibians native to this region. This experience allowed them to connect with nature on a more personal level, as they observed these remarkable creatures in their natural habitat and learned about their vital roles in the local ecosystem. A trip to the Bay Education Center in Rockport further provided students with an enriching and informative experience, immersing them in the ecological wonders of the area.

Campers were also privileged to have guest speakers from both Texas Parks and Wildlife and the American Bird Conservancy, who offered captivating programs that enriched their learning experience. These programs offered a wealth of knowledge about local wildlife, conservation efforts, and the significance of preserving natural habitats.

STEM activities, encompassing robotics, engineering design, and scientific experiments, were carried out in a classroom environment. The excursion to the Johnson Space Center provided campers with a unique opportunity to witness real-world applications of STEM principles. They had the chance to explore cutting-edge technology, interact with space experts, and gain insights into the scientific endeavors that drive space exploration. This visit not only reinforced the importance of STEM education but also sparked inspiration, motivating campers to pursue their interests in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

We are grateful for the generous funding that made it possible to offer such a transformative and enriching experience for Matagorda County. This support has not only enabled us to provide valuable educational opportunities but has also created lasting memories and inspired a deep appreciation for learning and exploration. We look forward to continued collaboration and the positive impact it will have on the community.