

On Course *With Nature*

# Inspiring Stewardship Throughout a Community

Extending environmental stewardship beyond the golf course and into the schools.

BY JULIE RIGG

Located just off northwest Florida's scenic highway 30A in WaterSound, Florida, Camp Creek Golf Course is a 36-hole facility featuring a dunescape appearance, accentuated by magnificent wetlands, woodlands, lakes, sand dunes, and rolling contours. Under the leadership of Larry Livingston, golf course superintendent at Camp Creek, the course has been designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. That in itself is an outstanding accomplishment, but Larry's dedication to environmental stewardship extends beyond the golf course. Larry is recognized by his peers as a leader in the industry because he uses his knowledge and experience to assist others in becoming better environmental stewards, including the youth of his community. For the last several years he has participated in a mentoring program with Seaside Neighborhood School in nearby Santa Rosa Beach.

It's not surprising that Larry takes this kind of initiative. He is one of the

"Mentoring at Seaside Neighborhood School" is a community-based mentoring program designed for students in grades six through eight. Students can take subjects such as carpentry, music, culinary arts, and business finance. The school's goal is to present students with career possibilities and have the kids build relationships with professionals in the community, while broadening the students' perspectives before they enter high school and college.



few Audubon International Stewards in northwest Florida, which puts him in the unique position of generating environmental awareness across multiple generations within his community. Although Larry's focus for the program is golf course maintenance, he admits, "I wanted to do more, and I think it's a good opportunity to show post-development impact on the environment. The students bring home handouts about the natural environment and share their experiences with their parents." Larry hopes that students will then start conversations with their families about what they learn, and thus expand the reach of his efforts.

"I enjoy promoting environmental stewardship. The mentoring program is a great way to do this. I think it's easier for the kids to develop good environmental habits because of their age," says Larry. The mentorship has allowed him to "understand the environmental mindset of the students," which helps him to tailor the programs

to address areas of misconception or lack of understanding.

Cathy Brubaker, principal at Seaside Neighborhood School, is proud to say that there have been up to 14 different categories in the program, and a mentorship at Camp Creek is "one of the favorites." She also says, "We give eighth graders first choice, but usually we have to bump a few students from the Camp Creek list because we have so many students who sign up for it." Larry is pleased with so much interest in the program, but he says, "We limit the program to six students for safety reasons. With that number we can safely get the students around the course in golf carts to the areas that we'll be studying."

Larry's spirited lessons provide basic information as well as hands-on experiences. One week it's "soaping for worms," another it's tying bricks to former Christmas trees and sinking them in a pond to create fish habitat. Other lesson topics include wetland study, effluent water management, and

composting. One of the most exciting activities at Camp Creek allows the students to help by releasing carp into some of the lakes on the course. Larry explains, "Because the carp eat undesirable aquatic vegetation, we have not used any aquatic herbicides in the water for weed control except for emergent weeds like cattails."

Larry also offers a "mini-course" in fertilizer application and instructs students about how to take soil samples and send them to a lab for analysis. "From there, we take the soil sample results to the fertilizer room and look at the different numbers on the bags and talk about what the blends and

numbers on the bags mean and make a final determination as to what fertilizers need to be ordered." Larry underscores the importance of proper handling, label instructions, and how to measure and apply fertilizers. He says that "when fertilizers are applied properly, there is no harm to others. It's a simple but good point to follow."

In addition to his roles as a golf course superintendent, environmental steward, and mentor to young people, Larry has taken two of the three modules of the Florida Master Naturalist Program (Freshwater Wetlands and Coastal Systems) and is scheduled to take the Upland Habitats module this

fall. He also gives a short presentation each year at the Walton County Environmental Forum about Camp Creek's environmental efforts. This past May, he gave a presentation about participation in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses to the Choctawhatchee Audubon Society. With the mentoring program and his own continued environmental education, Larry has found ways to both practice his stewardship and inspire a community.

For more information on the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses or about Audubon International, please visit: [AudubonInternational.org](http://AudubonInternational.org).

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Being an environmental steward means being able to form partnerships and foster communication among people striving for a common goal. Larry achieves this by having both academic and professional partnerships in his community. In addition to his relationship with Seaside Neighborhood School, he works well with the staff at Troon Golf, managers of Camp Creek, and says, "They know the importance of environmental efforts and have supported me in whatever I have wanted to do at the course." Through this kind of joint effort, Larry serves as a model for others interested in serving as a resource for their community.

He has demonstrated his dedication to instilling an environmental ethic and serves as an inspiration to people in the Santa Rosa Beach area.

