# 4-H students earn state award

## Work in parish after Rita, Ike recognized

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**Submitted photo**

Members of the Lafayette Parish 4-H Junior Leader Club learn about aquatic ecology in a pond at Beaver Park in Lafayette. The club has been chosen for a Governor's Conservation Award by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation for helping coastal restoration efforts in Cameron Parish and for assisting fellow 4-H members there recover from hurricanes Rita and Ike.

It's never too early to begin having a positive effect on neighbors and the environment.

Members of the 4-H Junior Leader Club in Lafayette Parish recently discovered those efforts can earn accolades as they were selected for the Governor's Conservation Award by Louisiana Wildlife Federation for helping Cameron Parish after hurricanes Rita and Ike.

"It took a hurricane for us to realize that teens can do this, that we can really do anything we want," said Teurlings Catholic student Kasie Dugas, who was in the 8th grade when Katrina and Rita struck Louisiana in 2005 and is the group's secretary. "It (the award) re-affirmed what we did. It's like the icing on the cake."

"We didn't do this for the award," said Emily Desormeaux, a Comeaux High School junior, president-elect of the parish Junior Leader Club. "We did this to make an impact on people's lives."

"We were on a retreat near New Iberia the weekend Katrina hit," said LSU AgCenter 4-H Agent Charles Hebert. "Telecommunication is limited. You have to go there by boat. We were evacuating as Katrina hit. Then a month later Rita hit, and we felt more connected to people affected by that storm. We had already worked in Cameron and had a retreat at Rockefeller."

"We wanted to help 4H groups there any way we could," Dugas said. "We toured the area, talked to 4H members and other groups. A lot of people were giving what they thought they needed, but we asked them what they wanted. They said they wanted the community to come back together."

Vice President Desiré Taylor, a Carencro High junior, said they were shocked and brought to tears by the devastation.

"It was very emotional," Desormeaux said.

Once the local group learned what students needed, several programs were started to help them.

For students who were active in raising and showing animals, the Lafayette 4-H'ers delivered donated show supplies such as water buckets, feed buckets and grooming aids. Oak trees were planted, and in some cases re-planted after Hurricane Ike ruined their first efforts at restoring vegetation.

They also conducted an educational Water Festival that helped Cameron Parish fourth graders learn the importance of water conservation and protecting the environment.

Lafayette Parish 4-H students took a group of Cameron Parish students on an educational trip in the summer of 2006 to Tennessee where they enjoyed outdoor team-building sports, including white-water rafting.

"It was good to see a face connected to what we were doing," said Dugas, who plans to study wetlands and oceanography at LSU. "It was good to see them having fun."

"Our youth had a leadership role with adult assistance to make decisions and solve problems related to their service," Hebert said. "They have built upon their experiences and are now catalysts for social change on Louisiana's coastal restoration and conservation."

Hebert said club members strengthened community ties, developed strong partnerships with more than 20 community groups and built lifelong friendships with 4-H members in Cameron Parish.