

Youngsters Soak Up Conservation Lessons at the 10th Annual Lee County Water Festival

Interactive Learning Experiences Aim to Create New Generation of Water Stewards

By [Ann Miller](#), Festival Coordinator and Lee County Earth Team Volunteer, Auburn, AL

On March 14th and 15th, 2013, the Haley Center on Auburn University's campus was filled with Lee County 4th graders, their teachers, and volunteers.

All students, teachers and students received a free t-shirt to wear to the Water Festival. A t-shirt art competition was held the first of the year and the winning student's art was printed on front of over 2,000 t-shirts prepared for the festival. The winning students were:

- 1st Place - Minyoung Jang, Richland Elementary, Mrs. Weeden- Teacher
- 2nd Place - Thomas Foster, Beulah Elementary, Mrs. Manning-teacher
- 3rd Place - Alex Jenkins, Cary Woods Elementary, Miss Cleveland - teacher



Students build and enjoy eating edible aquifers.

Over 1,700 fourth graders excitedly sat in classrooms and auditorium seating like the college students they are preparing to be. They were engaged in fun, educational activities, and learned about water conservation and environmental stewardship at the 10th Annual Lee County Water Festival.

Lee County Earth Team Volunteers taught and assisted in classes, and helped students get from busses to classes, to entertainment, and back on the busses. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Auburn Office and Lee County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Supervisors moved supplies from storage to the class rooms at Haley Center, kept the classrooms supplied during the festival, and returned all the left over supplies back to storage for next year.

The students got to do experiments while they learned.

One activity was the "Edible Aquifer." Volunteer instructors used ice cream and toppings to teach them how an aquifer works, and the importance of keeping underground water clean. The ice cream constituted the ground, clear soda represented groundwater and precipitation, chocolate syrup was motor oil, red sprinkles were ant poison, and green sprinkles were fertilizer. The activity showed how easy it was for everyday chemicals to seep into the ground and harm the water supply.

The goal was for the students to come away with a information that will stick with them; so they'll be conscious of water conservation and maybe aware of things most people don't think about—like spraying chemicals or just dumping chemicals in your backyard. They learned that this can have detrimental effects on the water system—the same water they are drinking.

Students participated in another activity in which they built a mini water filtration system with a funnel, anthracite, gravel, sand, and muddy and clean water. Volunteers explained that this is one of the biggest parts of the process at water treatment plants. In our city, water comes out of a lake and goes through the water plant. In building this mini version of a water filter the kids got a good idea of how important and how much of an effect it has on cleaning the water.

Workers from the City of Auburn Water Board volunteered their time to the Water Festival as instructors. They explained how expensive it is to clean the water. They explained that there is not an infinite supply of water, the population will grow, but the lakes don't get bigger. Even if you conserve water, you can't handle a larger population for very long before it becomes a real issue.

In another activity, children made a water cycle bracelet to wear and take home with them. Each bead on the bracelet represents a different phase of the water cycle. Volunteers helped students make the bracelets.

The Lee County Water Festival was a great opportunity for students of all ages to learn about the environment and water cycle, and how to protect the world they live in. Students were able to take information



home to their parents; information about conservation and daily household things everyone can do to conserve water.

After attending the two activities, the students could barely contain their glee as they watched the "Paul Cash Environmental Magic Show." Cash, based in California, educates children about beneficial environmental practices while entertaining them. He developed the show about 15 years ago when he performed his environmental magic for WorldFest, LA's largest Earth Day festival. Currently, Paul works for Central Basin Water Municipal District and educates schools in 27 cities in LA County about environmental awareness with his act. "I teach students simple things they can do right now and make it fun for them to learn," Paul explained. "Students seem to remember the magic years later and with the environmental message behind it—it's pretty effective that way. Plus, we use a rabbit in the show—they always seem to remember something about the rabbit."

The Lee County Water Festival began in 2004 and is backed by Lee County SWCD and NRCS Auburn Field Office. The event lets people know how precious water reserves are. It is important that students learn about water quality and quantity using these different skills and take something home and educate their parents about being good stewards of conservation. The Lee County Water Festival is really about educating the whole community.

If you would like to volunteer for the Lee County Water Festival or be one of the sponsors for next year's event, please contact coordinator Anne Miller at 334-740-5466 or e-mail the.millers30@hotmail.com.



Earth Team Volunteers are vital to the success of the Lee County Water Festival