

2012 TEEA Winner Education Category: Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Orange

Michael Hoke, Managing Director

We have 262 acres. About 200 acres has been left as pristine as possible for this particular ecosystem. We've developed a small portion, about 25 acres of botanic garden, and it's a fairly large project. Our mission -- mentoring children of all ages to be kind to their world.

Noelle Jordan, Environmental Education Coordinator

Our school groups are preschool through eighth grade. We get a few high school and college age groups in here, as well, and then we design public programs for families, for adults.

Students singing:

Tasting and touching, we have five, we have five...

Deborah Ellender, Kindergarten Teacher, Bridge City Elementary

We love to come to Shangri La. We come every year and it gives the kids the opportunity to get out of the classroom. The more they can touch, and feel, and see, and taste, and smell, the more they will be able to retain the information.

Volunteer:

Celery's not everybody's favorite vegetable.

Student:

But celery's healthy.

Volunteer:

It is healthy. Anybody else need a piece of celery?

Noelle Jordan:

We get a lot of tourist from all over the country, from all over the world.

Michael Hoke:

Today, because you're here, some special things are happening. Thirty school kids are going to get to come out here absolutely free. It's a special treat to have you here today, but just know that because you're here, you're helping environmental education throughout the area.

Volunteer:

Use your monoculars. You saw a turtle?

Noelle Jordan:

We call them teachable moments, and they're the unexpected things that happen when you're here. It could be a bird flying right overhead. It could be an osprey catching a fish out of the bayou while they're on the boat. You never know when those moments are going to happen or what they're going to be, but I think those are the things that people really walk away with.

Michael Hoke:

We just decided we wanted to not only preserve the land but make it a little bit better. We were able to go thorough and develop Shangri La with that philosophy all the way through until in 2009 the American Institute of Architecture chose us as the top ten green projects in the world.

The only way we're going to get kids to really appreciate the environment is if they learn about the environment.