

Press Release

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Contact: Colleen Strickland
Sumter County Schools
(352) 793- 2315 x50224

Re: Earth Day Thank You

It's hard to believe it's been nine years! On Saturday, April 16, the 9th annual Earth Day celebration, which took place at the CEMEX Center Hill Quarry, home of the Sumter Environmental Education Center, was a resounding hit with the community! More than 900 people attended and enjoyed environmental awareness activities and literature provided by 24 agencies, businesses and schools.

An eleven-year partnership between the Sumter County School Board and CEMEX has resulted in a wonderful resource for the students of the district. A classroom facility and property provide many opportunities for students to take their learning to the field. Over the eleven years, students have been involved in habitat restoration activities, fish studies, wetlands monitoring, and other programs to grow their knowledge and appreciation for Florida's fragile environment. Superintendent Richard A. Shirley said, "CEMEX has been a wonderful business partner. Students have not only learned Science through hands on outdoor experiences but have also learned about great STEM related (and other) job opportunities in the mining industry. We want our students to have every opportunity for college or a career."

One of the goals of the partnership is to involve the community in environmental education opportunities. Thus, was born the Earth Day celebration at the S.E.E.C. (Sumter Environmental Education Center). Jarell Fox, an annual visitor to the celebration said, "My family has been coming to the Earth Day event since our twins Ian and Ely were three years old, six years later they still love it. Every year they look forward to the snake at the Florida Native Plant Society and the mine tour. Of course, playing in the sand is another highlight. We are looking forward to the 10th annual Earth Day event next year."

Thanks to the generosity of our community businesses and CEMEX vendors we were able to hold the event and even grow participation! Visitors received free recyclable shopping bags when they arrived. They were entered into gift drawings and ate free of charge! Without a doubt, the longest line was at the Grumpy's Ice Cream stand, where visitors and volunteers alike returned multiple times!! Right behind Grumpy's in popularity were the CEMEX mine tours. Visitors were thrilled and fascinated by the guided trips.

Exhibitors included Sun Spot Creations, National Wild Turkey Federation, The Rock Guy, Florida Native Plant Society, Florida Department of Health, Florida Forest Service, Southwest Florida Water Management District, UF/IFAS Extension Service, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, Florida Industrial Phosphate Research, and Sumter Electric Cooperative. Many of the exhibitors donated items for the popular prize giveaways. The Florida's Blood Centers Bloodmobile was also onsite and extremely pleased with the generosity of donors.

South Sumter High School's Junior Naval Reserve Officer Training Corp opened the event with a presentation of the colors. SunSpot Creations was a popular stop for those who enjoyed unique gem and rock jewelry creations. The fossil dig was definitely the favorite spot for young and old alike!! Laneve Thompkins of SANDesign offered classes in sand sculpting of Florida native animals and landscapes. Her event was made possible by a generous grant from Suncoast for Kids Foundation,

Suncoast Credit Union. Each school had interactive booths to include making hair accessories made from used plastic bags, recycled grocery bags, sand bottles, water color painting and slime. The Wildwood Elementary School Chorus performed several environmental songs and the South Sumter Middle School Band entertained the visitors with familiar songs. The crowd was treated to a beautiful medley of tunes by the Wildwood Middle High School Concert Band and the South Sumter High School Jazz Band.

This event could not have been the phenomenal success it was if it were not for the many generous sponsors. We would like to express our sincerest thanks to our many partners in this wonderful community endeavor. First and foremost, our presenting sponsors, CEMEX and Dyno Nobel must be thanked immensely. Without their significant contributions, the event would have paled compared to last year's. Other generous partners included Ring Power Caterpillar Corporation, who provided and cooked all of the great hotdogs, Suncoast for Kids Foundation (Suncoast Credit Union), Sumter Electric Cooperative, Flatwoods Consulting Group, The Colinas Group, GeoSonics, SurvTech, Progress Energy, Holland & Knight, Global Contracting Group, Florida Rope, Duke Energy, Thomas E. Langley Medical Center, and PanaVista Lodge. Some donated money, others donated goods and services. Several sponsored specific events. Each was such an important part of the success of the event!

All who participated in this event; the 60+ volunteers, exhibitors, and sponsors deserve an immense thank you for their contributions to making this event such a wonderful opportunity for our community. Pictures of the event can be found at <https://sumter.smugmug.com/>