

## **South Fork High School students spend a day with eight Martin County community leaders**

Jessica Layne, a member of the Treasure Coast community. This story is neither endorsed by nor affiliated with this site.

Originally published 11:47 a.m., April 2, 2010  
Updated 11:47 a.m., April 2, 2010

**STUART** — Through the Sustainable Martin Alliance, eight leaders from Martin County organizations volunteered their time last week to give Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) students from South Fork High School (SFHS) an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of their community from a sustainability perspective. During the highly acclaimed “Martin County 101: It’s Different Here” education program, speakers offered information under a sustainability framework that included four key elements: the natural environment, the built environment, the economy and social systems.

Among the presenters were: Stacy Ranieri from The Firefly Group; John Wakeman from the Environmental Studies Center; Boyd Gunsalus from the South Florida Water Management District; Scott Berry from the Children’s Services Council; Dan Martinelli from the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center; Nikki Van Vonno from Martin County’s Growth Management Division; Brian Powers from the Indiantown Gas Company; and Crystal France from the Business Development Board. Topics ranged from agriculture, tourism, diversity of local business and industry, natural resources, water resources and challenges, local comprehensive planning and growth, crime and safety, education, voter participation, health, literacy, and social services.

While MC 101 has been offered to citizens of all ages, this is the second year that the program has been conducted specifically for students at SFHS, thanks to a grant from the Education Foundation of Martin County. Having covered Global Sustainability Issues in two classes previously, Stella Boland, AP human geography teacher at SFHS, invited the Sustainable Martin Alliance volunteer speakers to engage her students from a local perspective.

“I always try to present a global framework and then apply it at the local level,” Boland said. “This is why this workshop is so perfect for my students. In fact, if we repeat this next year, every student graduating from South Fork in the IB program will have gone through this program.”

Both AP Environmental Science students and IB Biology seniors were able to join Boland's students, allowing more students the ability to participate this year.

Dan Martinelli, executive director of the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center uses plants and animals as part of his presentation. He discusses the economic and social impacts of various native versus exotic vegetation and wildlife, and the unintended negative impacts exotics can have on native species. Among the items popular with students were a baby alligator and a Bofu Marinus, commonly known as a Bofu Toad.

"It's important to teach citizens of any community that the intended consequences of their decisions should, but often do not, equal the actual consequences," Martinelli expressed. "And it's important that the students learn the law of 'unintended consequences' because they grow up to be the next generation of leaders in our community. The goal of the MC 101 program is to give it to them straight. No bias, no angle, just cold-hard facts."

SFHS students Jeanie and Katie Pope, both 15, of Palm City felt they could really relate to the topics that were covered. Teen statistics shown by Children's Services Council's Scott Berry were "pretty surprising," Jeanie Pope said. "And since they all tie into our age group, it caught my attention the most. Especially the figures about teen deaths. That one really shocked me. "

As someone born in Martin County, Katie Pope felt that MC 101 "really showed us what Martin County is about, how we got to where we are today and how we need to work for Martin County to protect it."

Martin County 101, now in its tenth year, was created by the Sustainable Martin Alliance, a non-profit organization dedicated to being a neutral resource for information about environmental, economic and social issues that create more sustainable communities. To register for the program, or for more information, call 772-287-5272 or email [info@fireflyforyou.com](mailto:info@fireflyforyou.com).

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