

# **CITRUS COUNTY COUNCIL**

PO BOX 925 Lecanto, FL 34460

[www.citruscountycouncil.org](http://www.citruscountycouncil.org)

*"Working together to preserve quality of life in Citrus County"*

## **EDUCATION COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT - 2009**

At the direction of the membership, the Education Committee launched an appeal to keep the Marine Science Station in Crystal River open. From the district's own website:

The Marine Science Station facilities are located on a fifteen-acre marsh hammock that fronts the Salt River to the north with the remaining sides facing the tidal marsh. It offers the best hands-on experience with education of marine sciences and biology. Students have the opportunity to get up close and learn about Florida's amazing and beautiful nature that we have in our own back yard! Improvements to the site include two dormitories that accommodate 30 students each, along with their teacher, dining hall, student classroom/wet laboratory with aquaria, assembly room with computer lab and an office. A fifty-foot observation tower and a library are also available for student use.

As chair pro tempore of the Education Committee, this president launched an appeal to keep the Marine Science Station open. Letters were sent to School Board members and state legislators urging them to find the funds, a relatively small amount at \$200,000 considering the district's budget of \$216 million, to keep the facility open. An open letter was posted on a state education blog decrying the irony in the lack of support for marine science on the Nature Coast.

A few of the identified features, advantages and benefits of the Marine Science Station are:

- 2000 students attend each school year
- Student groups from Citrus County and other counties in FL as well as from other states & other countries attend
- Citrus County School Board invested \$500K in the MSS museum
- The MSS generates revenue
- District involved in capital improvement projects
- Science education is an indispensable part of general education

The Council believed the station offers a place of hands-on learning, exploration and the enjoyment of learning, set within the context of this gift we are privileged to experience – the Gulf's Nature Coast. Instruction in this setting instills a love of experimental inquiry that is transferable to all disciplines. In our opinion, closing this science education facility, even temporarily, for budgetary reasons, would demonstrate an unfortunate lack of foresight on the part of the School District and the School Board, and would further reinforce Florida's reputation as state that did not value the education of its primary natural resource, i.e., its youth.

Greg Schmukal, delegate from Too Far, Inc., also attended the School Board meeting as part of the Council delegation, reinforcing the many reasons for the Science Station to remain funded and open. The board eventually complied with our request.

Bob Dougherty, delegate from North Citrus Civic Association, became the Council's representative at the School Board's monthly meetings. The Chair for this committee remains open.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Theodora C. Rusnak  
President 2009