

Mentoring Future Stewards of the Carolina Coast



Courtesy Richard Johnson of Masonboro.org

Wilmington, N.C. - Young students are exploring and learning about the state's barrier islands through a hands-on educational program supported by volunteers, a local nonprofit, the state, and the generosity of local businesses.

Nonprofit Masonboro.org president Richard Johnson, in partnership with North Carolina Coastal Reserve, announced expansion of the Masonboro Island Explorer program, designed to mentor and develop future stewards of the Carolina coast.

Beginning April 22 and continuing through the month of May, fifth-graders from Gregory and Sunset Park Elementary schools in New Hanover County, will have the opportunity to explore and learn more about the coastal ecosystem.

Lori Davis, educational coordinator for the Reserve said, "We are pleased to partner with Masonboro.org to provide this unique learning opportunity. Our goal is to develop and deliver activities which align with state educational standards and meet the mission of the Reserve."



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Dr. LaChawn Smith, assistant superintendent of New Hanover County Schools commented, "The Masonboro Island Explorer program is a fabulous way to get kids out of the classroom to experience first hand some of the wonderful outdoor educational resources in our back yard. We are grateful to see local organizations come together and provide such great opportunities for our students."

"We are thrilled to partner with the Reserve," said Haywood Newkirk, Masonboro.org board member and chairman of the Masonboro Island Explorer committee. "They developed and delivered a coastal educational program for the Rachel Carson Reserve in Beaufort teaching thousands of students over the years. When we saw their experience and expertise, we decided there is no reason to reinvent the wheel."

"We could not offer the Explorer program without the support of local businesses and individuals," said Johnson. "Marine Max has supported us from the beginning. They totally understand the value of promoting a responsible coastal experience. We are pleased they decided to increase their support." Marine Max is the program's key sponsor.

Thom Cross, general manager of Marine Max said, "We are pleased to help so many young adults discover the natural beauty of Masonboro, and of course what may be some students first boat ride ever."

Masonboro.org started the Island Explorer program in 2013 with Wrightsville Beach Elementary School. Cissie Brooks, marine science coordinator at Wrightsville Elementary, developed the curriculum and has since joined the Explorer committee as educational coordinator.

Captain Joe Abbate, known as the Cape Fear naturalist and owner of Wrightsville Beach Scenic Tours, provided transportation for the 2013 program and will continue providing transportation services this spring. A long-time supporter of fostering stewardship through outdoor education adventures, Captain Joe joined the Masonboro.org Island Explorer committee.

"Our mission is to promote responsible use, protect public access, and preserve the traditions of Masonboro Island," said Johnson. Masonboro.org is a non-profit organization founded in 2009.

Johnson invites public support to expand the Explorer program by joining the \$25 club, enough to send one child on the educational expedition. www.Masonboro.org

"The mission of the North Carolina Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve is to promote informed management and stewardship of estuarine and coastal habitats through research, education, and example," said Davis.

Masonboro Island Reserve is managed by the North Carolina Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve, a program of the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management.

[Press photos and logos: Masonboro Island Explorer Program](#)



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