

Students haul in 653 pounds of trash in creek, Oaks Mall cleanups

The more than 100 students were part of precollegiate programs at UF.



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Cecilia Ju, along with other University of Florida Student Science Training Program volunteers, pick through the forest floor to clean up litter along Hogtown Creek.

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What could have easily turned into a day spoiled by outside forces resulted in 653 pounds of trash being gathered outside Creekside Mall.

A cleanup held by Adopt-a-River, a branch of Current Problems, started off slowly when buses didn't arrive at the University of Florida at 8:30 a.m. to pick up the more than 100 high school students who were volunteering their time.

Groups of students were supposed to arrive at six locations by 9 a.m. but were unable to board buses until about 9:30 a.m.

The 27 students whose cleanup site was The Oaks Mall were transported by two UF vans and collected trash quickly as if to make up for lost time, gathering about 200 pounds of trash in their first hour in a 100-yard area.

Mid-morning rain stopped the volunteers, who were either from the Students Science Training Program or Young Entrepreneurs for Leadership and Change, but only for about 20 minutes. The cleanup lasted until noon.

Students were led by Elliot Hart, 21, a UF student, and Steve Everett, a program instructor for the UF Center for Precollegiate Education and Training.

Of the sites chosen, the mall was likely the one that had the most trash, Hart said.

Some students participating said their interest in the cleanup was personal.

"We need to restore the environment or it will end up not being able to be used," said Alex Ghanem, 16, a student with the Students Science Training Program, who proudly showed off a T-shirt he earned after restoring an oyster bay near his home in Fort Myers. "We will have bigger problems in the future if this continues."

It's lessons like these that program director Everett stresses.

When people pollute, it ends up in the aquifer or the ocean, he said. So it's important to remove items from the surface to help stop pollution from spreading, he continued.

"This stuff impacts wildlife, scenic views, water," Everett said.

While Everett said he was impressed with the work of the volunteers, he couldn't help also being disappointed.

"These kids are from around the state," he said. "Local people should take responsibility."

The program has been active for 16 years and has about four major cleanups a year.