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MICHAEL STRADER MARKED FOR THE HERALD

READY OR NOT: SafeSide hurricane preparedness students Alex Starling and Nylus Stanton, both 12, work under the watchful eye of Richmond Heights teacher Brian Lopez at the Miami Metrozoo Zoo School on Thursday. The students are part of the Science Zoo Magnet program that includes the SafeSide project.

HURRICANE READINESS TAUGHT

Class at
Metrozoo
Page 3

Kids learn hurricane readiness

Course offered at 420 schools

BY MICHAEL STRADER MARKO
mmarks@herald.com

Nylus Stanton stares into the fearful and mysterious eye of a Category 4 hurricane, pondering its dark secrets. But, for the moment, at least, the 12-year-old has nothing to fear.

The storm he's watching is just part of a computer presentation on the serious business of living in Hurricane Alley.

Nylus' computer show was for his Project SafeSide class taught at the Richmond Heights Middle School Science Zoo Magnet program. In the class at Metrozoo, students study the science of severe weather in all its forms and learn about disaster preparedness and response.

"I'm in this class 'cause I like science and 'cause I would like to do something to protect our house if a hurricane comes," Nylus said.

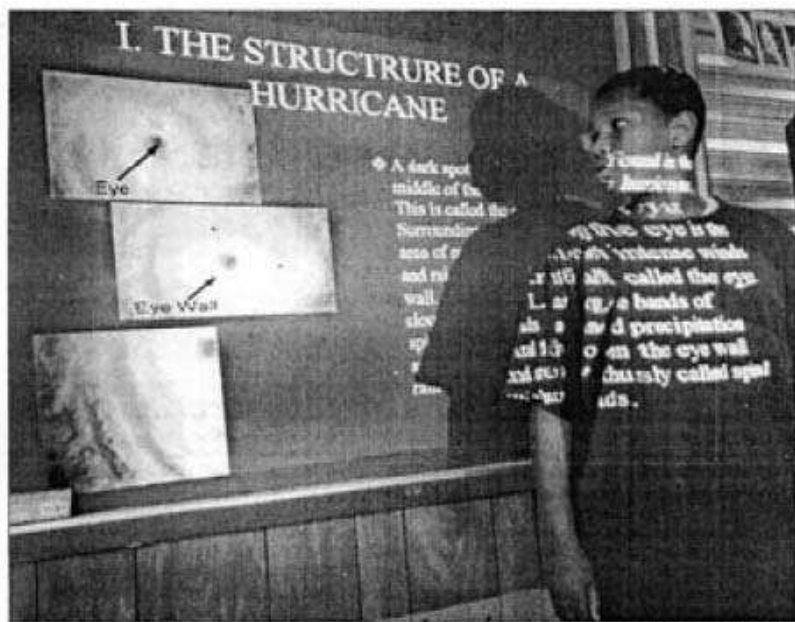
The course, in its second year, was created and funded by the Weather Channel and the American Red Cross in 1995 to address the need for weather education. It is sponsored locally by AT&T cable services and intended to give students the training to save lives if another big one, such as 1992's Hurricane Andrew, strikes.

Already 420 schools along the coastal regions are taking part in the popular course.

"The first objective was the coast because they are in the most danger," said Bay Proby, Florida coordinator for Project SafeSide. "But now we will start working on the interior."

In Miami-Dade, 66 middle and high schools are taking part in the program this year, accounting for 96,596 students — about 1,500 of them from Richmond Heights Middle.

"I think there's a number of other programs that bring awareness on hurricanes," Proby said, "but this is the only one I know of that does it by going into middle and high schools teaching at this level."



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL STRADER MARKO FOR THE HERALD

WORDS OF WISDOM, WARNING: Eric Rodgers, 12, and his classmates prepared PowerPoint presentations to illustrate hurricane preparedness in the Project SafeSide course at Richmond Heights Middle School.



STEP ONE: Teacher Brian Lopez assists Eric Rodgers, 12, with his PowerPoint presentation as part of the Project SafeSide class in the Science Zoo Magnet program.

MIAMI-DADE

Students are trained like disaster relief workers and given "responsibilities in class that government officials have during disasters," SafeSide teacher Brian Lopez said.

Students form a mock city, elect officials and assign others

to disaster recovery support roles. They set up a mock operations center, then simulate the approach and landfall of a severe hurricane. They work on the problems of advance planning and dealing with the unexpected during recovery.

Lessons learned in the program can carry over to home life.

"I think kids have a great impact on what happens in their families," said Suzanne Banas, magnet program coordinator.

It makes good sense, Banas said.

"When a disaster occurs, communities will be better prepared because families will be better prepared."

Program benefits teen girls

Abstinence the primary focus

BY ROBERT CONTRERAS
Herald Writer

In one class at Palmetto High, the lesson is a long way from reading or math.

Carolyn Ross is teaching abstinence, a touchy subject for her 12 or so female students. But it's at the core of a new program aimed at keeping kids out of trouble and in school.

PINECREST

The program, Recapturing the Vision, currently involves 15 middle and high schools throughout the county.

To hear some of the girls tell it, the approach — which is direct and to the point — makes a difference.

"My grades were horrible," said Amber, a 15-year-old member of the program. "Now, because of [the] program, I get B's and C's. In math, my grades are beautiful — straight A's."

Shanekia, another 15-year-old, said she has learned a lot from the classes, which also focus on building self-esteem and repairing fractured relationships with parents.

"I used to hold stuff back from [my mother]," Shanekia said. "But now, I tell her everything."

She, like the other girls, has also taken the message of abstinence to heart.

"A boy is not going to be there forever," Shanekia said. "You just wait until you get married."

The girls are either referred to the program by teachers, parents or they select it themselves.

Using textbooks and workshops, Ross lectures the girls on topics that include first impressions, self-image, self-awareness, peer pressure and domestic abuse.

With the class also designed to encourage self-discovery the girls can share their per-

▶ PLEASE SEE VISION, 27