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**IEKHS Students Take a Virtual Tour to a Coral Reef**

Teaching in the time of coronavirus has been very challenging to say the least, but that has not stopped Ms. Michealrose Ravalier, Ivanna Eudora Kean High School (IEKHS) teacher from finding creative ways to engage her students. Ms. Ravalier knows that learning is more meaningful if students can relate and interact with their environment. She wondered, “How can I adapt a lab about fruit fly behavior so that it would be more culturally relevant for my students? Our real world is right here in our own backyard, in this case, in our coral reefs.” Last year, Ms. Ravalier led students on field trips to Coral World to study corals, marine ecosystems, and human impacts on our oceans. That experience led her back to Coral World.

Valerie Peters, Marketing Director of Coral World, quickly agreed to the use of the park as the location for a virtual lab. Peters, who is passionate about bringing the private and public sector together for the benefit of environmental education and has brought ECO Schools to the USVI, was thrilled at the prospect of working on this project. Peters observed, “These types of collaborative efforts are key to engaging students in meaningful project-based learning and to encourage them to be part of finding the solutions to the many sustainability challenges we face. This project is a perfect example of what we can do when we work together.”

Howard Forbes, Jr., Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service Coordinator at the University of the Virgin Islands was happy to assist with filming 360-degree video of the coral reef at Coki Point. He and Jarvon Stout have been involved with monitoring Stoney Coral Tissue Loss Disease (“SCTLD”) primarily through capturing videos or photos of the disease to be used in classroom presentations. Howard explained the benefits of the 360-degree camera: “The use of 360-degree cameras helps to make standard photos come to life by making them more immersive and giving the viewer the feeling they are actually there. The benefits of this technology are far-reaching as it can be paired with virtual reality goggles/headsets to bring hard to access environments such as the ocean and guts to a classroom setting.”

The Virtual Field Trip to the Coral Reef provided the opportunity for students to study Coral Behavior in response to environmental changes. Students experienced first-hand the impact of how warmer marine waters affect corals. As ocean temperatures increase, corals bleach and also can suffer from infections. The Virtual Field Trip video will be available for other students to learn about coral reefs.

Students Candace Wade-Franklin and V’Andre Rochester served as the data collectors for this outdoor laboratory project. Wade-Franklin noted, “The whole day was filled with excitement and support. I enjoyed every second of the day.” Rochester said, “I got to see beautiful fish interact with each other in their natural habitat and learn about some of the challenges corals face because of climate change.”

In addition to making observations, they were able to assist Logan Williams, Research and Education Coordinator at Coral World, in cleaning of the Coral Tree (nursery). As a member of the Virgin Islands Coral Disease Advisory Committee, Coral World Ocean Park is engaged in the management and mitigation of the SCTLD in the Virgin Islands. Williams, a former graduate student at the University of the Virgin Islands, College of Marine Science, leads the effort and research at Coral World to find solutions for restoring corals damaged by SCTLD. Williams noted “It is so important for this next generation to claim ownership of our coral reefs - these ecosystems are vital for our tourism, our local fisheries our shorelines and our welfare. I hope that I can inspire these students to pursue a career in local coral reef conservation, restoration or research so that we can preserve these incredible ecosystems for future generations.”

Ravalier reflected, “I cannot thank our partners enough for collaborating to provide such an amazing hands-on learning experience for students: Dr. Lawanda Cummings of VIEPSCOR/STEM for her insight to coordinate the initial collaboration team, Forbes and Stout for conducting the underwater filming and creating the 360-degree Virtual Field Trip video to the Coral Reef; Coki Dive Center for providing diving gear and equipment, Mr. Vincent Henley of IEKHS for serving as a chaperone and life guard, and of course Coral World for allowing Williams and Peters to share their professional expertise and allowing the use of their facility to complete this lab. Also, thank you to the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School Administration and VIDE family for their support I do believe that it truly takes a community to educate a child. It is my hope that this project will inspire other educators and students to explore new frontiers right here in our Virgin Islands. “

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About Coral World Ocean Park

Coral World Ocean Park is a marine park in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands and is accredited by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA). Dedicated to providing the highest quality of care for marine mammals and contributing to conservation efforts through scientific research, Coral World offers programming to educate visitors about conservation and how they can make a positive impact on maintaining the integrity of the marine ecosystem. Through interactive experiences that allows visitors to get up close and personal with marine life surrounding the Virgin Islands, Coral World strives to inspire the next generation of animal advocates and conservationists. For more information, visit the Coral World website at https://coralworldvi.com/.