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Earth Education

Adlen W. Robinson; For the Forsyth County News

A passion for teaching others, especially children, about the importance of all things environmental has led two Forsyth County women to form a nonprofit educational organization.

"There is really nobody quite like us," said Denise Carleton, who founded Reaping Nature Productions with Mary Nix in October 2010.

"We offer a program that is a highly educational experience that really incorporates every subject, including math, social studies, health, science and reading."

Carleton said they have conducted programs for groups ranging in size from a dozen to more than 300 children.

In addition to their recycling and waste reduction programming, Carleton and Nix also target graffiti.

"So many children do not even know what graffiti is and they certainly do not realize that it is a felony," Carleton said. "If a child doesn't have that information and is caught, that could change their lives."

Carleton has written a book about graffiti, "The Gross Graffiti Cover-Up," which has been recognized by Keep American Beautiful.

It was through Keep Forsyth County Beautiful that Carleton met Randy Payne, the environmental health and safety manager at Tyson Foods in Cumming.

Tyson gave Reaping Nature a storm water enviroscape, a model that demonstrates various environmental cause-and-effect experiments, such as how erosion clouds rivers.

"It is wonderful to see a grass roots-type organization with people who truly care about educating our children as well as protecting the environment," Payne said.

"Denise and Mary reach many children of Tyson employees, so we wanted to help them with their efforts in any way we can."

Payne is also a frequent guest speaker at the two "eco" clubs with which Carleton and Nix are involved.

"Many people do not realize that there are naturally occurring bacteria that actually take organic pollutants out of water," he said.

Payne added that he enjoys using experiments and models to illustrate environmental lessons.

"When they see a bug under the microscope for the first time, the expression is priceless," he said.

In addition to water quality, Carleton and Nix are passionate about recycling.

"Nobody wants a landfill in their back yard, but the longer we can keep one operating, the better off the environment is," Carleton said.

"And if everybody would recycle more and do their part to help reduce waste, the longer a landfill would stay operational."

Carleton became an avid recycler about a decade ago, after her family moved to Atlanta from New Jersey.

When they relocated to Cumming six years ago, she got involved at her children's school, Daves Creek Elementary.

"I was the recycling coordinator, and then we formed the Green Team, an after-school environmental club for fourth-and fifth graders," Carleton said.

While putting together an event for America's Recycle Day, Carleton asked Nix, a fellow parent, to pen a song.

Nix, a performer at heart, did more than that. She performed the song she wrote as Petunia Garner, a child character who loves to sing, learn and make people laugh.

Nix writes the songs and performs the skits, all of which are centered around teaching children environmental responsibility.

Carleton and Nix's efforts have not gone unnoticed. Each woman has received recognition from various groups, including the local school system and Keep Forsyth County Beautiful.

"We want children to know that they can be part of the solution and not the problem," Carleton said.

She added that there are many ways resident can help cut down on waste.

"Even something that seems small, like watering your grass less, can have an impact," Carleton said. "If it rained 2 inches in the last few weeks, maybe you don't need to set your sprinkler system to just automatically come on.

"The point is, we need to stop being mindless and think of ways we can all come together to protect and improve the world we live in."

