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# Biology Department Plans Earth Day Event at Stratford Point

Jennifer H Mattei, *Sacred Heart University*

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The Biology Department at Sacred Heart University is celebrating Earth Day this year with a project at Stratford Point that will have volunteers planting saltmarsh grass to help restore the eroding shoreline. The event, spearheaded by Professors Jennifer Mattei, LaTina Steele and Jo-Marie Kasinak, will take place Friday and Saturday, April 21-22 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Students of all ages and local volunteers will learn how to care for our fragile coastal habitats and estuaries. "The Lordship Cub Scout Pack 74 in Stratford were the first to volunteer," declared Kasinak, who also is outreach coordinator of Project *Limulus*. "These scouts, who help us with our horseshoe crab study, already understand the value of the beaches and saltmarsh for the survival of fish and wildlife." Coastal development, pollution and continued harvest of fish and shellfish have changed the very structure and function of the shores of the Housatonic River and the Sound, Mattei noted. She and Steele have been studying the use of 'living shorelines' to combat the effects of climate change that are contributing to coastal erosion.

"The celebration will serve as an educational event to teach participants how to care for estuaries and restore their ecological services that we rely on," said Steele "We need to find more natural solutions to these problems and not just try to wall out the sea."

This event is open to the public. In addition to student volunteers from SHU, the University's biology club, Green SHUs environmental club, and alumni are expected to attend.

"Sacred Heart's alumni engagement staff is enthusiastic about inviting our alumni to be a part of this Earth Day celebration. We have encouraged them to donate and help as much as they can," said Todd Gibbs, executive director of alumni engagement. "As a community, SHU is very proud of the research the faculty conduct to restore the shoreline, and we hope to demonstrate strong support for this event."

The first day will begin with participants planting salt-marsh grass plugs. Volunteers from area schools such as Fairfield Preparatory High School and Fairfield Country Day School, as well as the general public, will work in small groups, planting the two-inch saltmarsh grass plugs in front of the newly installed artificial reef.

Other activities throughout the day will include a beach cleanup and nature walks led by staff and members of the Audubon Connecticut to look for and discuss the importance of certain beach inhabitants, such as shorebirds and horseshoe crabs.

Thunderbird Environmental Group will provide complimentary lunch, snacks and drinks, and adults will be able to participate in beer tasting, courtesy of SoundView Brewing Co. The DuPont Company will provide planting tools and supplies.

The next day will follow the same schedule, with the goal of planting more than 15,000 saltmarsh plugs during the two days. Said Mattei, "If all goes well, the marsh will grow taller than most of the student volunteers by the fall!"

*To donate to this cause, [click here](#). To volunteer for the planting, [register here](#).*

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