



# JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE/JACL

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## JACL PRESS RELEASE

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### JACL Environmental Justice Youth Summit in New Orleans



JACL National Youth Student Council members Kaila Yoshitomi, Jeff Moy, and Matthew Farrels plant marsh grass at Bayou Sauvage with the U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service in New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Washington, D.C.,** -- This past weekend, the **JACL National Youth Student Council (NY/SC)** engaged in an intensive two day Environmental Justice Youth Summit in New Orleans, Louisiana. The NY/SC is comprised of student and young professional representatives who hail from various regions of the United States.

With the generous sponsorship of **State Farm Insurance** and **Southwest Airlines**, the summit was a collaborative effort of the [JACL](#) National Washington D.C. staff and local New Orleans groups **Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation** ([MQVN CDC](#)) and the **Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association-New Orleans** ([VAYLA-NO](#)).

The focus of the New Orleans Environmental Justice Youth Summit was to educate the summit participants about the environmental injustices faced by the local New Orleans community post Hurricane

Katrina and more recently the BP Oil Spill. In particular, New Orleans East is predominately comprised of a large Vietnamese fishing community, many of whom were left without work after the oil spill.

On Saturday morning, the summit participants headed out early to work with the [U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service](#) at the [Bayou Sauvage Wildlife Refuge](#) and planted marsh grass in Louisiana's Marshland. A once in lifetime experience, the summit participants crawled through and were waist deep in the Bayou Sauvage.

The rest of Saturday's summit schedule included a introductory screening of the documentary "[A Village Called Versailles](#)", which shed light on the struggles faced by the "invisible" Vietnamese and New Orleans East community after Hurricane Katrina. Following that, the summit participants were led on an enlightening environmental justice landmark tour by MQVN CDC staffer, **Daniel Nguyen**. One of the highlights of the tour was seeing the large toxic landfills which would have threatened the New Orleans East community's water supply if it had not been for the Vietnamese community's fierce protesting of the landfills.



MQVN CDC staffer, Daniel Nguyen leads the summit participants on a environmental justice landmark tour.

On Sunday, **Darcy Taniguchi**, a PhD candidate under UC San Diego's Oceanography program, presented on the biological effects of the BP oil spill. Following Taniguchi's presentation, summit participants participated in a "clean up your own oil spill" activity in which they were given a budget and tools to clean up an oil spill in a pie pan. In the afternoon, the summit continued with a collaborative meeting with Executive Director of VAYLA-NO, **Minh Nguyen**; Nguyen shared the inspiring work VAYLA-NO is currently doing and the NY/SC presented to local youth on the topics of JACL, the NY/SC, and Japanese American culture. The summit ended with a crawfish cookout generously hosted by **Jennifer Vu**, President of the New Orleans' JACL chapter and the New Orleans JACL chapter. The summit ended on a high note with **Father Vien Nguyen**, an honoree at this year's [42nd JACL National Convention](#), speaking about the community's work on environmental justice.



Darcy Taniguchi, UC San Diego PhD Oceanography candidate, presents on the BP Oil Spill.



JACL National Executive Director, Floyd Mori watches as Father Vien Nguyen speaks about the community's work on environmental justice issues.

Summit Participant Thoughts:

*It was great having the Youth Council literally getting down and dirty in the mud and water to plant marsh grass. I had a great time learning from local community members about the region and the effects that continue to linger from Hurricane Katrina and the BP Oil Spill.*

*-Devin Yoshikawa, National Youth Student Council Representative*

*"From planting marsh grass in the mud to a bus tour of illegal landfills and the after effects of a hurricane to a 40 pound crawfish feed, I have never had an experience where service, fun, great food, hands on interactions and adventure were all meshed together so seamlessly."*

*-Kaila Yoshitomi, Pacific Northwest Region Student Youth Representative*

*Opportunities like these for the JACL to partner with other APA communities is absolutely necessary. Through this summit we learned about the illegal landfill near the Vietnamese American community. The city's lack of compliance to remove the dump shows just how evident socioeconomic and racial disparities still are in our society. I believe that the JACL can serve as a catalyst for this issue to be voiced and publicized throughout the nation. It is now our role to assist and partner with APA communities in need.*

*- Rachel Seeman, Pacific Northwest Region Student Youth Representative*



Thank you to our sponsors Southwest Airlines and State Farm for making this Environmental Justice Summit possible!



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