



**For immediate release**

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**Contact: Diana Brewer, [diana@weeksbay.org](mailto:diana@weeksbay.org)**

**251.990.5004 o | 251.510.7203 c**

### **Weeks Bay Reserve education program thrives under Baldwin County resource teacher**

*“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn.” – Benjamin Franklin*

FAIRHOPE, AL -- For 25 years, students from across the Gulf Coast have had access to an outdoor classroom, a virtual treasure trove of hands-on nature discovery and learning, thanks to a partnership between the Baldwin County Board of Education (BCBE) and the Weeks Bay Reserve. By providing a resource teacher at the Reserve, BCBE gives schoolchildren of all ages, and their teachers, access to the estuary. This past school year, their instructor has been long-time educator Ilka Porter.

On any given field trip, students walk the boardwalks through the marsh and along the bay. Younger students see shrimp jumping, crabs crawling, and fish flipping into the water. Older students venture out on the bay to pull a seine; they also take water samples and view plankton.

With undergraduate and graduate degrees in elementary education, Porter taught in the classroom before moving to science centers and museums. She served as education director for both The Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center and GulfQuest Maritime Museum. In addition to the Reserve, Porter works as a STEM (Science Technology Engineering & Math) Specialist with the Mobile Area Education Foundation.

Her background in developing and leading education programs in science museums is being put to good use at the Reserve, where she prepares curriculum for the teachers and students visiting the estuary.

“This position requires someone with practical education experience as well as expertise in the areas of marine and environmental science, and Ilka has all of that,” said Angela Underwood, Education Coordinator at the Reserve. “Not only has Ilka taught in the classroom, but she has also developed curriculum and programs for children of all ages, and the education guides for teachers that go along with the programs. She’s an invaluable asset.”

“I love what we do here,” Porter said. “The many classes coming out this spring have been fantastic. It is really fun to facilitate the different grade levels – from elementary to high school. Each group is

different but they have all enjoyed discovering nature in their own backyard. And teaching about estuaries is so rewarding.”

The Weeks Bay Reserve is one of 29 reserves across the nation, part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. All the reserves have education programs, but only a few partner with their local school system.