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Coral World Ocean Park Gives Behind-The-Scenes Tour to Marine Vocational Program Students

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ST. THOMAS — Over half a dozen junior high and high school age students were invited behind-the-scenes at the Coral World Ocean Park on December 27 as part of their instruction in the Marine Vocational Program (MVP), the company has announced. The tour provided the students with an up close and personal opportunity to see key areas of the park and speak with the park's professionals not only about what they did, but how the students could one day become employed in these positions.

The impetus for this personalized 5-hour field trip took root in December when Trudie Prior, president and general manager of Coral World Ocean Park who has supported the MVP program since its inception over a decade ago, read about the swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving and boat handling skills the students were mastering via a Helm Report sent by MVP founder and director,

Jimmy Loveland.

“I thought a visit to Coral World could encourage the MVP students, who are gaining the skills we need at Coral World and inspire them by allowing them to see what doors these skills might open to job or career opportunities. So, I suggested a ‘behind the scenes’ look at what we do to care for our animals, what training a marine mammal like a sea lion or dolphin is all about, and what it takes to maintain our exhibits. And, of course, I wanted them to appreciate the importance of conserving our marine habitats, a message we try to convey to all our visitors.”

The MVP student’s specially-curated tour began with an overview of the Coral World Marine Park followed by visits to four departments that are directly related to marine job opportunities. First, the Park’s dive operations manager explained positions available for those who had a Dive Master or above certification as well as those who were rescue diver certified. Students then descended to the Park’s dive platform to see the equipment used for two of Coral World’s visitor ocean experiences. Next, students walked over to the Dolphin Sanctuary where they met with the lead dolphin trainer and learned about the steps needed to pursue an internship in the marine mammal field. Afterwards, the students viewed a veterinarian checkup training session. The private sea lion training session and the Reef Encounter kitchen were visibly the most enjoyed by the students.

“It was so cool to see a sea lion and watch them being trained,” says 17-year-old MVP student, Konasha Griffith. “I liked the underwater aquarium too, especially the sharks and eels, and recognized many of the fish we’ve seen when snorkeling. I’d like to work around the water; maybe become an oceanographer.”

For 12-year-old Roderique Leslie, it was the dolphin that caught his attention. “I liked to see them close up and how they were trained. The sea lions were awesome creatures too and so were the turtles. I’d love to work around the water and to work with animals like this one day.”

Coral World employee Nicole Greaux, who led the tour, said she was delighted with the student’s enthusiasm. “They asked insightful questions such as training levels necessary, where we get our feeding fish and how much education is needed. They were all engaging and answered any questions asked as well as asked question of their own. It seems to me that the MVP program is also preparing these students to develop a good work ethic and common courtesy, something that is missing in a majority of our youths.”

December’s visit to Coral World was an exceptional ‘behind-the-scenes’ experience and will long be remembered by the students, says Loveland. “The purpose of the visit was to open the eyes of the MVP students to the opportunity of future employment. Imagine the advantage of our local youth to simply hop on a dollar bus and be trained at one of the premier water attractions of the world!”