La. swamp gets student help during spring break

By BOB ANDERSON
Florida parishes bureau

University of Miami are spending a week in the swamp at Pass Manchac helping Southeastern Louisiana University.

"Break Away," a national nonprofit program, offers an alternative to the more hedonistic breaks taken by many college students.

In this case, it gives students a chance to dig holes in the middle of a real Louisiana swamp, complete with mosquitoes, mud and, as Novak noted, "quite a few snakes."

The project is being headed by SLU's Michael Greene, who deserves the Tom Sawyer Award and a bucket of whitewash for convincing the students they're having fun.

"It's incredible," said Novak, who added that he'd never walked through a swamp before.

The alternate spring breakers have picked up on the work already begun by students from several high schools and even one junior high, said Greene, who is director of the Southeastern College of Arts and Sciences' Connections program.

The work began in December and will continue through March.

So far, thousands of cypress seedlings have been planted on 60 acres and Greene hopes the college students can plant another 100 acres during their "vacation."

The company has split that money between SLU and a private mitigation site on Blind River.

Southeastern is using approximately $500,000 of the money to plant 36,000 young cypress trees in a portion of the Manchac Swamp known as Jones Island, which the university owns, Greene said.

Greene and his volunteers have to provide the muscle for the project.

Explaining why most of the college students participate, Greene said: "They've been to the beach before. They decided to do something worthwhile.

But Novak said they've also been promised today off for a first-hand view of Mardi Gras, provided, of course, that they can manage to clean off all of Monday's mud.