

From the community: HFCA Connects with the Community to Enhance Learning and Help Others



Mr. Gordon Gotsch, Biologist at the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation discusses the science of aquaponics with HFCA's middle school STEM class. (Posted by Holy Family Communications, Community Contributor)

By **Community Contributor Holy Family Communications**

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Holy Family Catholic Academy (Inverness) is nationally and internationally recognized for its commitment to engage learners with relevant, real world situations that impact local, national and international communities.

Recently, HFCA was approached by the McGraw Foundation and the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation (Dundee, IL). These non-profit organizations, both founded by Max McGraw, perform distinct, but complementary roles. The Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation is a national leader in wildlife conservation research and education, while the McGraw Foundation provides financial assistance for educational and

introduce the science of aquaponics to schools in

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Gordon Gotsch, Fisheries Biologist at the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation explained, "We understand the biology and science behind aquaponics, but we realize the need to partner with educational professionals who will develop lesson plans to teach young people about sustainable farming." HFCA's leadership in STEM education made it an ideal candidate to partner with the two foundations.

Gordon LaBounty, Executive Director at McGraw Foundation added, "We knew HFCA was the first middle school in Illinois to earn AdvancED STEM certification and approached them with our idea. We offered them a complete aquaponics system in exchange for using their expertise to develop lesson plans that would subsequently be shared with underserved schools."

HFCA Principal Kate O'Brien eagerly embraced the invitation. "This project was a wonderful opportunity. I was confident our innovative middle school teachers could contribute to developing the curriculum, and equally appealing, it was aligned with our goal of combining learning with service to others."

HFCA middle school teachers, Mrs. Jeanne Olmstead and Mrs. Eileen Papparone visited the wildlife facility in Dundee and developed a farm-to-table STEM unit, one of four units that HFCA middle school students will rotate through during the course of this year.

The unit engages students in feeding, measuring and weighing the fish, testing pH of the water and analyzing the crops grown through this method of sustainable farming compared to other methods of agriculture. Tasting the crops grown is an added benefit. Stated sixth grade student, Clayton King, "I learned that aquaponics uses 90% less water than traditional methods of farming, and the lettuce we grew tasted great!"

The partnership between the McGraw entities and HFCA is a benefit to all parties. After visiting the HFCA STEM class, Biologist Gotsch stated, "This is exactly what I was hoping to see! Mrs. Papparone and Mrs. Olmstead really understand the importance of engaging students in science."

Principal O'Brien agreed, "Our partnership with the McGraw foundations greatly enhances our students' STEM competencies and experiences, and our curriculum is further strengthened when our teaching and learning benefits others beyond our community."

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