



Mary Nevins

Increasing Awareness

Community outreach program combines fun and education to bring attention to storm water issues

As storm water regulations tighten, public education on storm water and water quality is becoming increasingly important. Storm Water Solutions Associate Editor Kate Cline spoke with Mary Nevins of Carolina Clear, a community education program developed by Clemson University, on the group's unique approach to public outreach.

Kate Cline: What types of events do you hold?

Mary Nevins: We're currently planning our 4-H₂O Pontoon Classroom day camps for the summer. In my area there are two of those, and we have several others throughout the state managed by other Carolina Clear folks like me. One is in Lexington County, at Lake Murray. We take the kids out on pontoon boats for two days. It's an outdoor day camp full of learning and fun, and it's all about water quality, appreciating water and learning how important it is.

Another program that we did last year that was really successful was our Summer Celebration of Water, which was a festival for families, also about understanding water quality and building appreciation of water. That was here in Columbia, and we had tubing and kayaking on the Columbia Canal, activities for kids, some live entertainment from the Columbia Marionette Theater and lots of nonprofits and community organizations talking about their role in water quality. It was a great day for people to get out and connect with the water.

Some other things we've been doing are rain barrel workshops and rain garden workshops. Both of those are popular with homeowners. We also did a rain garden workshop in Lexington

that was for professional audiences—landscapers and engineers who would be installing these for clients.

Cline: What other types of outreach efforts do you have?

Nevins: One of the advantages of the Carolina Clear program is that while we are coordinated in local groups, like the two that I manage, we have a statewide organization. We can develop really great resources, especially for mass media, that can be applied throughout the state.

We have a TV commercial that ran last fall, and we just completed another one that's set to run, although we haven't worked out all the details. It's a 30-second spot that goes from upstate down to the coast looking at different uses of water and talking about how important it is to keep it clean and specific behaviors people can do to keep the water clean and enjoyable—like keeping leaves out of the storm drain and picking up pet waste. There's a billboard design that's also going to go with that and be applied statewide that reiterates the images and messages from that commercial.

Cline: What advice would you give to an organization or municipality looking to increase outreach efforts?

Nevins: I would advise them to take advantage of partnerships and work

together as a community as much as possible. One thing we really try to do is involve all the different organizations that can be a part.

For example, we have a master gardener program at Clemson, and I've been working with them. They are great advocates for rain barrels and rain gardens, not only in their homes but when they talk to their garden clubs and other groups that they participate with. They can spread the message on that.

Most communities have some environmental organizations, like here in Columbia we have Keep the Midlands Beautiful. It organizes cleanups, and we work with them. I advise taking advantage of what's already going on and working with all the people that are already involved to get the most effect for your effort. **[SWS]**

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