

# Rollins Student to Plan for a more Environmentally Friendly “front yard” at St. Richard’s

My name is Tracey Comazzi. I am a junior at Hamilton Holt School, Rollins College majoring in Environmental Studies and Sustainable Urbanism. I chose Hamilton Holt School because I feel this major, and the four pillars of Rollins’ mission: Global Citizenship, Responsible Leadership, Meaningful Lives, and Productive Careers, will prepare me well for my future endeavors. The school also offers valuable classes that are not taught anywhere else such as Dr. Leslie Poole’s “Women and the Environment” class which is truly empowering.

Originally from Zimbabwe, Florida has been my forever-home for several years now. I am extremely passionate about this place, and the suburban sprawl and never-ending growth here concerns me a great deal, especially as natural land is disappearing at such an alarming rate. On a local level, I would like to see all public landscaping in Central Florida converted to native plantings as that would increase the number of environmental stepping stones available to local and migratory wildlife, birds and insects providing them with more suitable and reliable food sources and shelter. This would also reduce unnecessary water use and the amount of toxins entering out waterways from the chemical treatments that exotic plants and grasses need.

I have gained an added appreciation for what I learned in Professor Jason Houck’s class “Natural Habitats of Florida” since completing an internship with the Florida Native Plant Society’s Cuplet Fern Chapter. There I

gained hands-on experience with Florida’s native plants and plant communities and witnessed exactly how vital they are to healthy, well-functioning ecosystems. Designing and planning a native plant garden for an independent study is the ideal next step in the course of my studies, and I feel my goal for the area in front of St. Richard’s Episcopal Church ties in well with the church’s mission to discover God’s grace, change our lives and change the whole world. Changes in our environment can change how we feel, even change our lives, and if we have the opportunity to make a change for the better, we should embrace it. I hope that if this native plant garden can become a reality, it will exhibit the divinity found in nature and provide a place for reflection, and a place to breathe and reconnect with the natural world.