



BAY REFLECTIONS

Restoring Our Natural Water Heritage

Spring 2006

Dear Partners and Citizens:

Many significant changes have taken place since the last *Bay Reflections* newsletter. All are positive developments, I am pleased to report. Through all these transitions, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) has remained committed to our mission to restore our area's greatest natural asset—Sarasota Bay.

Strategically, the most significant development took place in July 2004 when the Program officially became an independent Special District of the State of Florida. As a government non-profit organization, the Program now can more directly influence public environmental policy.

Two new staff members have recently joined SBEP. Altesha Lazier, receptionist, is a pre-med student at Manatee Community College in addition to working full time at SBEP. Julia Burch is our new Public Outreach Coordinator. She grew up on the Chesapeake Bay, the world's largest estuary, and graduated from New College of Florida with a degree in psychology and environmental studies.

In an effort to reduce paper use and encourage readership, Julia has championed the idea of offering this newsletter electronically. I encourage all of you who wish to receive *Bay Reflections* via email each quarter to sign up on our



From left to right: Marian Pomeroy, Julia Burch, Mark Alderson, Altesha Lazier, Gary Raulerson and Rhonda Cesario at the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce new member ribbon-cutting

website, www.sarasotabay.org. When you visit the newly updated site, you will notice that the information is more accessible and easier to navigate.

SBEP just completed our first audit as a special district. Marian Pomeroy, Finance Director, worked diligently with a team of auditors for several weeks. For a first-time audit, the Program earned an uncommonly good report card, with no accounting problems or errors identified.

In April, the State of the Bay Report 2006 was released (see article, page 2). All SBEP staff, along with van Zandt Marketing and design group Tom Cross Inc., collabo-

rated to produce the most accurate and visually inviting report to date. In the near future, you will be able to download the full report from SBEP's newly redesigned website www.sarasotabay.org. We also encourage your comments on the new format and direction of *Bay Reflections*. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to restoring our beautiful Bay waters.

Regards,

Mark Alderson
SBEP Director

THE STATE OF THE BAY

The State of the Bay Report 2006, entitled "Celebrating Our Area's Greatest Natural Asset," details the wide scope of restoration and public education projects the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) has undertaken, focusing on the past five years. The report also highlights the collaboration of our many Program partners in restoring the health and productivity of Sarasota Bay.

The 40-page document contains up-to-date information on all aspects of Bay health, from water quality and hydrology to habitats and public involvement. The report also

touches on new findings regarding red tide, the need for development policy change, future planned enhancement

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projects and Florida-friendly landscaping, along with helpful hints on how to be an environmental steward. New this year to the State of the Bay Report is a user-friendly, fold-out Project Area Map at the back of the book.

This comprehensive map points out all restoration projects that SBEP has undertaken in cooperation with its partners, including future projects to improve the watershed.

Another feature, unique to this



report, is that it is the first report to be published concurrently in hard copy and electronic format. The full report will soon be available to download on SBEP's new and improved website www.sarasotabay.org. The site will be redesigned to make these types of documents easily accessible.

A companion video is being produced to showcase the SBEP and its community partners' efforts to restore Sarasota Bay. The video is scheduled to be released next year.



Bradenton's downtown marina



Students remove exotic plants at the Powel Crosley Museum.

WHAT'S NEW: RESTORATION & OUTREACH

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program's (SBEP) Sr. Environmental Scientist, Gary Raulerson, has been busy throughout the past year overseeing multiple habitat restoration projects. In August 2005, SBEP deposited bags of oyster shells (also known as oyster sausages) into Little Sarasota Bay to create hardbottom habitat suitable for oyster regeneration. Within two months, spat settlement occurred on the oyster sausages despite the red tide outbreak.

Fighting Invasives

SBEP continues to work with Sarasota County Parks & Recreation Department to remove invasive plants and re-establish tidal flushing at South Lido Park. SBEP has also been working with Sarasota County on the Bird Colony Island restoration project that is now in the permitting phase. In Manatee County, we are working in conjunction with Conservation Lands Management to remove invasive Australian pines,

Brazilian pepper and carrotwood from Pine Island. At Robinson Preserve, 150 acres will be restored by invasive plant removal and major earthmoving projects.

Students Get Hands-On

In fall 2005, we contracted with Around the Bend Nature Tours to run field trips for our in-school environmental education program, P.I.E.R. It has been a great success, and two more south Sarasota County sites will be available for use next school year—Oscar Scherer State Park and Red Bug Slough. The P.I.E.R. program has educated more than 5,400 students in Manatee and Sarasota counties since 2004.

SBEP is partnering with Rick Smith and ManaTeens to organize Bay Buddies volunteer events. The goal of Bay Buddies is to get kids out in the community parks to remove invasive plants, plant native species and remove trash. The first Bay Buddies event was

January 28 at Joan M. Durante Park on Longboat Key, where more than 100 students, teachers

and parents came out to help keep Durante Park healthy and beautiful. The second successful Bay Buddies event

was April 22 at Emerson Point Preserve where more than 100 volunteers planted 100 pine trees. Please contact ManaTeens at 941.761.3207 or www.manateens.org to register your participation in upcoming Bay Buddies events.

Join Us at Efest

The second-annual Efest takes place May 13 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall (Bayside). SBEP has committed to be an Estuary Level sponsor this year. Please stop by our booth (#75) to learn more about our programs, enter our raffle and explore how you can get involved in restoring Sarasota Bay.

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MANGROVES

Mangroves serve as barriers to shoreline erosion and stabilize sediments, thus reducing the effects of storm surges and heavy surf. Mangroves also help improve water quality by extracting excess nutrients and by facilitating the detoxification and storage of pollutants in those sediments. The recreational value of mangrove-dominated habitats cannot be underestimated, as they play an important role in boating, kayaking, sightseeing and wildlife observation. Although it is impossible to place a monetary value on these activities, hundreds of thousands of people visit mangrove parks and natural areas annually.

Mangroves as Refuge Areas

Mangroves are known for their high productivity and, consequently, are essential to the nutrient balance of adjoining estuaries and coastal waters. Mangrove forests also serve as important nurseries and refuge areas for a wide variety of terrestrial and aquatic organisms, including mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and invertebrates. Some of these species that benefit from the mangroves are either endangered or threatened—which further elevates the necessity of mangroves in our area.

Despite their ecological importance, mangrove forests are under intense pressure from development activities. Protection of mangrove forests is one of the world's greatest environmental challenges.

New Mangrove Guide

In an effort to raise awareness and help save mangrove forests, the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FY&N) program from the UF/IFAS Sarasota County Extension Service, the UF/IFAS Sea Grant program and Sarasota County Resource Protection are coordinating a series of community educational programs. The first program, organized by the UF/IFAS Manatee County Extension Service in

February, was attended by more than 80 professionals, and was a colossal success. Additional programs, geared toward homeowners, are planned for the near future. A brochure named "Guide to the Mangroves of Florida," was developed in partnership with the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens as an identification tool to support the educational programs. The funding for this exceptional piece was provided by the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program. For more information, visit www.flseagrant.org, www.selby.org or <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>.

Annemarie Post, *Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program Coordinator*



Mangrove forest at Blackburn Point



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