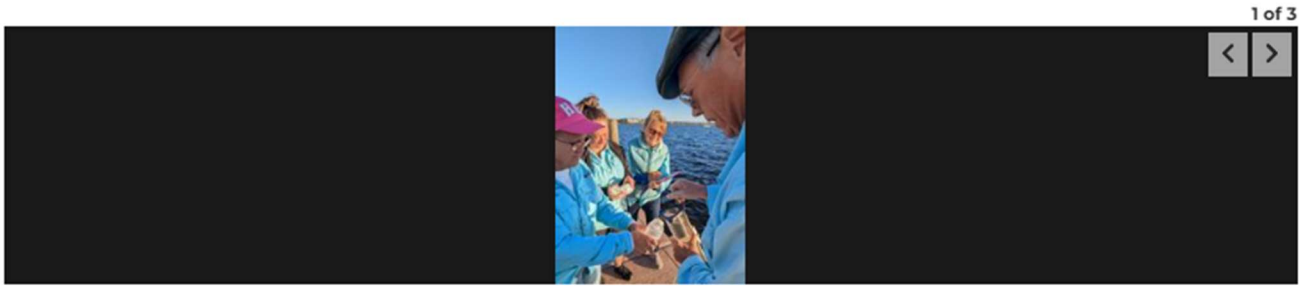




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## Heal Our Harbor tests water, educates public

By ELAINE ALLEN-EMRICH STAFF WRITER Apr 2, 2023 0



Dave Schutz, right, tests water along with Phyl Wojcik as a part of Heal Our Harbor.  
sun photo by ELAINE ALLEN-EMRICH

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CHARLOTTE HARBOR – Standing on the dock at Live Oak Point Park, Dave Schutz and Phyl Wojcik collect water samples from Charlotte Harbor.

Pyper Findley labels the plastic containers while other water testing is done.

Then the team travels to the El Jobean bridge and samples water from the Myakka River.

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Members of Heal Our Harbor repeat the process monthly.

About 75 people make up the scientists, teachers and volunteers to what was originally formed as a political action committee. It morphed into a 501©3 nonprofit on [Earth Day](#) in 2022.

Its mission, according to its [website](#), is to engage the public in monitoring the water quality of rivers feeding upper Charlotte Harbor; establish baseline water quality of outer tidal Peace and Myakka rivers; track trends at these river openings; identify elevated contamination, notify authorities and the public; develop a pilot program for use by other volunteer groups and provide educational opportunities on the importance of a healthy Charlotte Harbor.

“Yes, we test the water,” Heal Our Harbor President Richard Whitman said. “We track trends in rivers that feed into the water supply.”

Whitman is a retired university professor and research scientist for the National Park Service and the United States Geological Survey. He said the water tests are done in real time and the results are given to Charlotte County.

The group also tests for cleanliness or transparency in the water. They check to see if there’s oxygen for fish.

“The county also takes monthly water quality samples,” Whitman said. “The results take weeks before they are posted online to the public. So sometimes it’s a little late to warn the public if there’s a high level of E. coli and fecal coliform bacteria in the water which may indicate that the water may be contaminated with human or animal wastes.”

Heal Our Harbor recently worked with local teens helping them do water testing and learning about water quality and its importance.

The group watches for red tide, any regional spills and pollutants. They often post educational stories on the group’s social media page along with important meetings impacting the environment. They also give talks on the state of the watershed when invited to area activities or other civic group meetings.

“We want to educate people about what’s going on in our waterways,” Schutz said. “We will go to different events and talk about what we do. Education is a big part of what we do.”