



Heal Our HarborSM

We Work For Clean Water

Summer 2024

NEWSLETTER



Here's what we've been up to!

First, we would like to once again express our gratitude to all who donated through the **2024 Giving Challenge**. We are thrilled to report that as a result of your generosity and matching funds from The Patterson Foundation, we raised over \$8,600! Your support allows us to keep our programs running and is deeply appreciated.

Welcome to our first HOH newsletter!
We're excited to share with you the latest developments in our mission to protect and restore the Charlotte Harbor Watershed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Water Monitoring at Live Oak Point and El Jobean

Aug 15, Sept 19, Oct 17

CPCC Water Sampling

Aug 5, Sept 3, Oct 7

Annual Fundraiser
Save the Date !
November 9



CITIZENS PARTNERSHIP FOR CLEAN CANALS (CPCC)



We are now testing four locations monthly in the CPCC Program, with the goal to eventually collect data at 10 sites. Check out the CPCC Page on our website for further updates and information:

www.healourharbor.org



City of Punta Gorda Urban Design Grants Coordinator, Richard Lehmkuhl and Planner, Brittany Metzler joined us to observe our most recent CPCC water sampling. Alex Orenczuk from Fox 4 News did an excellent interview with Dr. Richard Whitman and Volunteer Coordinator, Karen McCague. You can catch the segment that aired July 1, at:

<https://www.fox4now.com/punta-gorda/volunteers-monitor-water-quality-in-punta-gorda-canal-for-bacteria>

CHARLOTTE HARBOR AMBASSADOR TRAINING PROGRAM (CHAT)



We are also excited to announce that we will once again be running our popular Charlotte Harbor Ambassador Training Program (CHAT). Many thanks to Charlotte County and the MAC Grant committee for again partly funding our educational program. Keep an eye on our website in the fall for details and sign-up early as this program is always over-subscribed.

INFORMATIONAL TALKS



We've been busy giving Informational Talks. On March 7, our Treasurer, David Schutz, spoke to the residents of Waterford Estates, and most recently on June 17 to the FFC club of the PGI Civic Association.

If you are interested in having us give a talk to your group or community about the ecosystem and water quality of Charlotte Harbor, drop us a line at: info@healourharbor.org.

SEAGRASS SURVEY



In July we once again participated in the University of Florida's 'Eyes on Seagrass' initiative.

At assigned locations, trained Volunteers from Heal Our Harbor collected information on seagrass health, sediment, algae presence, and water quality.

Seagrass is an important food source for many species, and also helps to clarify our water and isolate carbon and nitrogen. Charlotte Harbor saw a 23% loss in seagrass coverage between 2018 and 2021.

Learn more at:
<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/charlotte/sea-grant/eyes-on-seagrass/>

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Karen & Jim McCague

Karen's skill, energy, and commitment as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Citizens Partnership for Clean Canals (CPCC) program is inspiring.

Jim has graciously agreed to take on the role of Technician and will care for, calibrate, and man the testing equipment needed for sampling each month.

We're grateful for such dedicated volunteers!

FROM A BOARD MEMBER

Dr. Richard Whitman
CEO



What a Difference a Decade Makes

Coastal living is an intrinsic part of my spiritual DNA. Some of my fondest childhood memories involve swimming and fishing in neighborhood ponds, exploring the seagrass beds of Padre Island, enjoying the surf of Boca Chica, and navigating the Rio Grande River. When people ask when I decided to become an aquatic ecologist, I admit it was as far back as I can remember. I blame my parents for giving me a microscope when I was just six years old. Unsurprisingly, I spent nearly a decade in school, earning a BS, MS, and PhD in aquatic sciences. My career began at NASA in Spacecraft Sanitation, transitioned to a biology professorship at Indiana University NW, and culminated after 25 years as the Chief Scientist of the Lake Michigan Ecological Research Station (National Park Service/USGS). We planned our retirement meticulously and chose Charlotte County for our new home. Everyone has their own criteria for finding a home, but if you're reading this, you likely agree that healthy, enjoyable, and safe coastal living is a priority. And so it was with Charlotte Harbor. The variety of fish and wildlife was astonishing, seagrass meadows seemed endless, and healthy beaches were a given. Sadly, a lot has changed in just ten years.

Charlotte Harbor is no longer the gem we once discovered. Today, its ecosystem is in crisis and on the brink of collapse. What was once a reasonably balanced estuarine system capable of sustaining a healthy fishery and ecology has become a victim of over-fertilization. It is now less resilient to dramatic disturbances such as hurricanes, red tide, climate change, and the ongoing stressors of coastal development. This has led to an increase in invasive filamentous algae over seagrass, blue-green algae over healthy plankton, a decline in sports fish, prolonged and intense red tide events, massive animal die-offs, serious human health risks, loss of water clarity, increased discoloration, and unpleasant drinking water. Most recently, Alligator Creek and many canals in Punta Gorda have been cited by the US EPA and Florida DEP for its unacceptable levels of fecal indicator bacteria.

These concerns led to the founding of Heal Our Harbor (HOH) just three Earth Days ago. Our mission is to provide scientific information, education, and perspective on the environmental health of the Charlotte Harbor watershed. Our motto is "WE WORK FOR CLEAN WATER." Our achievements have been noteworthy. We have established monitoring and investigations of the Peace & Myakka Rivers and East Wall canal systems, created the Charlotte Harbor Ambassador's Training program, and engage in routine consultations with local communities, managers, and policymakers. We advocate for Harbor improvements, regularly speak at engagements, and most importantly, work closely with the community on the welfare and rehabilitation of Charlotte Harbor.

Our beloved Charlotte Harbor is in crisis, but you can help Heal Our Harbor. Join as a member, volunteer, participate in activities, sign up for our classes, attend our seminar series, help at events, join like-minded gatherings, take samples, report problems, spread the word, write letters, join a HOH committee, and support sound policies for Charlotte Harbor. There is much to be done, but together we can make a difference. We can reverse the damage we've witnessed, but we need a focused, science-based plan and a concerted effort. The next decade is critical not only for the Harbor but for the quality of life for ourselves and our children. Charlotte Harbor can once again become the cherished gem that drew us here. The Harbor is our most important natural resource. Yes, you can help Heal Our Harbor. Join our efforts to restore our waters to the treasure nature intended them to be, this national prize safe, enjoyable, swimmable, fishable, and drinkable once more.