

LEMON BAY NEWSLETTER CONSERVANCY®

SUMMER 2012 VOLUME 41 ISSUE 2

for the preservation,
protection and
acquisition
of natural areas
important in maintaining
the ecological
balance of Lemon Bay,
Charlotte Harbor and
adjacent waters

Conservancy
President Jim Cooper



From The President

Thanks to the enormous contributions of our wonderful donors and volunteers, Lemon Bay Conservancy is continuing to build momentum as we focus on our mission: *“To forever protect and preserve the natural wonders of Lemon Bay, Charlotte Harbor and their surrounding waters and uplands.”*

As you will read in this newsletter, almost ten acres of environmentally-sensitive barrier island uplands and wetlands are the latest addition to Lemon Bay Conservancy’s property holdings, thanks to a very generous donation by Garfield and Dean Beckstead.

You’ll also find details inside about an exciting tarpon research project that we are developing with Mote Marine Laboratory to study the juvenile tarpon habitat in Lemon Creek and the impacts of planned restoration work on the tarpon nursery.

At Wildflower Preserve, hundreds of hours of volunteer work are combining with a grant from the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, and donations from many groups and individuals to help us as we convert this former golf course into an outstanding nature preserve.

Our 2012 Toast to the Coast was our most successful fund-raiser to date!

I am constantly amazed by the expanding range of community groups and talented individuals who are stepping forward to support our efforts! Thank you all!

Sincerely,
Jim Cooper

In This Issue

From the President	1
Toast to The Coast	2
Wildflower Preserve Update	4
Tarpon Research at Wildflower	5
Thornton Key Land Donation	5
New Board Member: Weldon Rogers	6
Please Help With Your Generous Donations	7
Donation Form	7
Photo Contest Winners	8

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Gasparilla Inn Beach Club outdoor party area

2012 Toast to the Coast

On Wednesday, February 29, 2012, Lemon Bay Conservancy celebrated Leap Year in grand style at the Toast to the Coast fundraising event at the beautiful Gasparilla Inn Beach Club on Boca Grande. LBC President Jim Cooper and the host committee of Dean & Jamie Beckstead, Gar & Sanae Beckstead, George & Lois Castrucci, Bill & Katie Caldwell, Pat Chapman, David & Laurie Dignam, Walter & Jean Meanwell, Bayne & Jeanie Stevenson, and Bryan & Diane Troutman welcomed 200 members and guests to an evening of steel drum music, cocktails, a silent auction and a lively live auction conducted by Jimmy Dean, publisher of Harbor Style magazine.

A new feature this year was the display of amazing photographs of the flora and fauna of Wildflower Preserve that were entered in the first Wildflower Photo Contest. Board member Eva Furner announced the winners: 1st place to Burr Tucker for his photo of a



Hilary Dahms and Louie Mauran Groton

White Peacock butterfly, 2nd place to Mary Lundeberg for her image of a Red-bellied Woodpecker, and 3rd place to Donna Strich for her close-up of a Bobcat. The People's Choice Award went to Lois Snyder for her Otter photo.

President Jim Cooper reported on the progress of the juvenile tarpon sustainability program being developed at Wildflower Preserve in cooperation with Mote Marine Laboratory of Sarasota under the direction of Dr. Aaron Adams. Captain Sandy Melvin announced that Lemon Bay Conservancy



Sanae and Gar Beckstead, Jamie and Dean Beckstead



Sandy Melvin, Sigrid and Brian Corcoran



David Dignam, Matt DePalma, Kathy Castellano and Liz Crapet

would be recognized for its efforts at the World's Richest Tarpon Tournament held in May in Boca Grande with proceeds from the sale of Kids' Day Tournament t-shirts donated to LBC.

The highlight of the evening was the announcement by LBC Vice President, Jim Wade of the donation by Dean and Garfield Beckstead of 9.77 acres of prime environmentally sensitive land on Thornton Key to Lemon Bay Conservancy. *(See the related article in this newsletter.)*

LBC extends special thanks to our loyal sponsors of the Toast to the Coast: Florida Shores Bank, Key Agency, Palm Island Resort,



Jimmy Dean and Gail Giles

Useppa Island Club, the Community Foundation of Venice, and Melvin Properties. We thank all our members and friends who, through their

participation, enable us to continue our projects and fulfill our mission. We look forward to seeing you at Toast to the Coast 2013!

Wildflower Preserve Update

Congratulations to Jay Harrison and Todd Richter, from Boy Scout Troop 198, who have both been named Eagle Scouts after completion of their eagle projects at Wildflower Preserve! Jay led the construction of an impressive information kiosk adjacent to the preserve parking lot. Todd's project included construction of bird blinds, benches, and a solar water fountain as he created a new bird observation area at the preserve.

In November, Lemon Bay Conservancy received a \$5,000 grant from the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) to be used for improving the Wildflower trail network and our preserve focus areas. With grant funds, LBC purchased two chain saws and a weed trimmer that have been used by our volunteers to clear new trails within the preserve and to remove Brazilian Pepper and other invasive species near the preserve ponds. Four new loop trails have been established and marked, and a new trail brochure has been created. We are currently adding interpretive and plant identification signage along the trails and in the butterfly habitat, and we are creating a new wildflower meadow east of the preserve parking lot. The Conservancy is grateful to CHNEP for providing this funding and we encourage all LBC members to become familiar with the many positive programs that CHNEP sponsors as they work to protect the natural environment from Venice to Bonita Springs to Winter Haven. You can find out more on their website, <http://www.CHNEP.org>

Many of the new Wildflower interpretive signs contain symbols called QR codes. The QR codes are

square black and white symbols that can be scanned by smart phones with QR code reader applications. In our case, we are setting up each QR code to point to a short video on the Internet that will give visitors to the preserve interesting information about the area in which they are standing. Our volunteer trail guides are developing the content and narrating the videos, and volunteer Bob Winter is handling the production. In addition to viewing the videos by smart phone, you can watch them on any computer with Internet access.



Men's Garden Club of Englewood work crew for the outdoor seating area project. Front row (l to r): John Halvorsen, Ed Opatrny, Jim Sciarrello. Back row: Paul Jarvi, Tom Duch, Bob Aspery.

The web link for the video series is <http://www.youtube.com/user/lemon-bayconservancy>.

Many thanks to the Men's Garden Club of Englewood for installing 10 benches in a new outdoor seating area at the Preserve! The sturdy benches were placed in a semi-circular design at the edge of the meadow south of the parking lot. They provide an excellent location for conducting educational programs.

We also thank Abbie Banks

and the North American Purple Martin Society for their donations to improve the bird habitat at Wildflower. Abbie arranged for the Purple Martin Society to donate a Purple Martin house and three Bluebird nest boxes for Wildflower. She also personally donated four Bluebird houses. Within 24 hours after the new martin house was in place, the birds were already checking out their new home! Abbie and volunteers Tom and Gayle Duch are out at the preserve monthly monitoring the nest boxes and recording bird sightings throughout the preserve.

During the winter season, volunteer trail guides conducted public walks at the preserve at least twice a month, with turnouts of as many as 50 visitors for some sessions. From December through February, we held our first preserve photo contest, with over sixty photographers participating.

Dr. Bill Dunson led many of the walks at the preserve during the year and delivered his presentation about the development of Wildflower Preserve to a range of civic and environmental organizations. Bill also arranged two fish sampling sessions with volunteers from the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, who donated their time to help us establish baseline information about the fish present in our Wildflower ponds and in Lemon Creek. Bill's walks, presentations,

research and newspaper articles continue to attract positive interest in the preserve.

On March 31st, we held a Wildflower Open House to show-off the many improvements under way at the preserve and over 200 people attended. The programs included hourly trail walks, an "Introduction to Geocaching" session and our first ever "Dragonfly Walk." Representatives from CHNEP, CHEC and the Men's Garden Club of Englewood staffed information booths and the boy scouts served food.

Speaking of dragonflies, Eva Furner, Pam Neer, Norman Desjardines, and Marilyn Wilson developed a special brochure about the Dragonflies of Wildflower Preserve as part of their training in the Florida Master Naturalist Program. Copies of the brochure are now available at the entry kiosk. Dragonfly experts Don and Kathy Hess have conducted two informative dragonfly walks at the preserve

and we hope to schedule additional walks in the months ahead.

Throughout the winter season, Lucia Schattelyn and Phil Dakin organized twice a week work days. Over a dozen volunteers regularly showed up to work on tasks like cutting trails, moving mulch, and removing weeds. Thank you to everyone who participated!

As the summer begins, Jane Wallace and Maura Qualls are continuing to work on the butterfly habitat, while Phil Dakin and Bob Fowler work on trail maintenance. And, our water sampling teams continue to complete monthly surveys in the ponds and creek. We are looking for additional volunteers to help with these projects and with ongoing maintenance and improvement of the bird observation area, the gopher tortoise meadow, and the wildflower meadow. If you think you might like to join the Wildflower volunteer team, please call the office at 941-830-8922 and we'll find an opportunity that matches your interests!

If you'd like to visit Wildflower this summer, Phil Dakin is leading monthly "Wake-up with Wildflower" nature walk through the summer months. To maximize the wildlife viewing and minimize the heat, Phil's walks begin at 7:30 a.m. To join one of his informative walks, call the LBC office for a reservation. The Preserve is also open daily to Lemon Bay Conservancy members for self-guided visits.

Tarpon Research Initiative at Wildflower Preserve

One of Dr. Bill Dunson's early discoveries at Wildflower Preserve was the presence of juvenile tarpon in the Lemon Creek tidal ponds on the western side of the preserve. The Wildflower Preserve portions of *continued on page 6*

Thornton Key Land Donation

The Lemon Bay Conservancy has received a gift of some 9.77 acres of property on Thornton Key, adjacent to Palm Island. The donation was made by Garfield and Dean Beckstead, creators of Palm Island Resort located on Palm Island and the historic Useppa Island Club located in Lee County.

The generous donation, valued in excess of \$600,000, is north of the 30 acre Thornton Key Preserve purchased by Charlotte County in 2009. Adding this property will result in one of the largest park and preservation areas on any barrier island on the southwest coast of Florida.

Jim Cooper, Conservancy President, said, "We are overwhelmed with gratitude for the generosity of the Becksteads. They have long been valued supporters of

the Conservancy, but this gift is truly extraordinary."

The donated property consists of a number of buildable residential lots as well as several acres of environmentally sensitive wetlands which border the "Hidden Lake" area of Thornton Key. This pristine body of water is, as its name implies, hidden from view and nearly inaccessible. Islanders and environmentalists that have found "Hidden Lake" are struck by its beauty and the extraordinary flora and fauna it supports.

The Becksteads' gift to the Conservancy ensures that the donated acreage bordering the Lake will never be developed or disturbed. Further, the donation of this property should provide a catalyst and strong motivation for other property owners in that area to donate their sensitive land to the Conservancy.

Lemon Creek connect to Lemon Bay by passing through culverts under Placida Road and into the open creek

Bonefish & Tarpon Trust. Over the past 10 years, he has conducted research on mangrove creek and wetland habitats in Charlotte Harbor, with a focus on the importance of these habitats for fish communities and as nurseries for recreationally important fishes, including snook, tarpon, and redfish. His studies in the creek systems on the eastern shore of Charlotte Harbor

make this project happen! Lemon Bay Golf Course has graciously agreed to allow the monitoring RFID antenna for the program to be placed along Lemon Creek as it passes through the course. Captain Sandy Melvin created special t-shirts featuring the Lemon Bay Conservancy for the Kid's Tournament at this year's World's Richest Tarpon Tournament on Boca Grande and donated proceeds from the sale of the shirts to support this initiative. So far, generous donors have contributed \$64,000 of the estimated \$120,000 needed to complete this study. If you would like to contribute or learn more about this study, please call the Lemon Bay Conservancy office at 941-830-8922.



A juvenile tarpon being measured as part of the fish sampling at Lemon Creek.

bed that runs through the Lemon Bay Golf Course.

While the Lemon Creek areas in Wildflower still support tarpon and many other species, over the years, the construction of culverts and the addition of fill for the old Wildflower Golf Course have reduced the creek's area and restricted the tidal flows into and out of the creek. Lemon Bay Conservancy is currently pursuing grant opportunities that will allow us, over time, to expand the creek area within Wildflower Preserve and improve the creek's tidal flow.

LBC is pleased to be working with Dr. Aaron Adams on a new research initiative for Lemon Creek. Dr. Adams is developing a project plan to study and document the health of the Lemon Creek system within Wildflower Preserve before and after restoration to measure the success of the restoration at providing and improving juvenile tarpon (and snook) habitat.

Dr. Adams is a Senior Scientist at Mote Marine Laboratory and Director of Operations for the

have shown that undisturbed creeks are better habitats for juvenile fishes and for fish communities that depend on these habitats, than creek systems that have been disturbed by development.

The proposed multi-year Lemon Creek study will include funding a graduate student to conduct quantitative fish sampling within the creek, DNA testing, tagging of juvenile tarpon with PIT tags to monitor their survival, and the use of an RFID antenna system to monitor the numbers of tagged juvenile tarpon leaving the creek system and entering Lemon Bay.

Since the true measure of the quality of a juvenile (nursery) habitat is the number of juveniles that grow and are able to leave the nursery, this study will provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the restoration at providing juvenile tarpon nursery habitat.

We hope to begin the monitoring project in August 2012. As with all of our Lemon Bay Conservancy initiatives, we are relying on the help of our many friends and donors to

New Board Member: Weldon Rogers

We are pleased to welcome Weldon Rogers to the LBC board of directors. Weldon is a St. Louis, MO transplant to Boca Grande where he now lives year round. Weldon was in various businesses during his working career, including banking and investment banking in NYC, working for an auto parts manufacturer in Troy, MI and a cement producer



Weldon Rogers

in St. Louis, and finally in the office seating business with his own firm. Along the way he was a director of a bank that is now part of Bank of America and other small firms in various businesses. He is still a director of two companies in St. Louis and one in Thomasville,

NC. He also serves on the board of the Lemon Bay Golf Club. Weldon is divorced and has four children and six grandchildren. He enjoys golf, tennis, singing in his church choir, and participating in the Royal Palm Players and other local organizations.

Please Help Us with Your Generous Donation

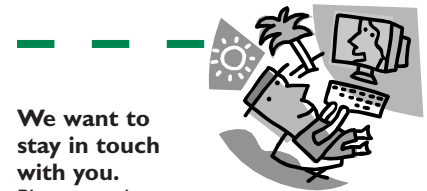
As you can see from this newsletter, the Lemon Bay Conservancy is involved in many exciting initiatives to improve

the natural communities that all of us enjoy in the lands and waters that surround us. Protecting land, developing new nature preserves, and conducting research initiatives are expensive endeavours. Your membership fees and your donations are essential to our work.

If you are not yet a member, please join the Conservancy. If you are already a member, thank you! Any additional donation that you provide will be well used. Please pass along this newsletter to one of your friends and invite them to join us as well.

If you currently work for or are retired from one of the hundreds of

companies that offer matching gifts for donations to non-profit organizations, please take a few minutes to find your firm's matching gift form and include it with your donation. For many companies, the forms are available on the Internet and can be found by a Google search on your firm's name and the phrase "matching gifts". Another source for the forms is a call to your company's benefits department.



We want to stay in touch with you.

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I/we want to support the Lemon Bay Conservancy with the enclosed check for the amount shown below:

- \$25
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 \$1,000
 \$5,000
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 \$20,000
 \$50,000
 Other \$ _____

Please make checks payable to Lemon Bay Conservancy, Inc.

LBC is a 501c3 Non-Profit. Contributions are, in general, tax deductible. Please consult with your tax professional if you have any questions.

Please mail your completed check and form to LBC at the address below:

Please remember to include a matching gift form from your company, if applicable.

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Donations can also be submitted online at www.LemonBayConservancy.org, or by calling our office at 941-830-8922

