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# Students Earn Grant to Enhance Harbor Clean-Up Efforts

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Stephanie Lawler speaks about the watergoat

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (Feb. 7, 2011) – The Student Environmental Awareness Society at USF St. Petersburg recently received a \$3,500 Bay Mini-Grant from the Tampa Bay Estuary program for the installation and maintenance of a 75-foot watergoat that will help keep trash and pollutants from the city out of Tampa Bay. The new watergoat was installed by New Earth Industries, Inc. on Thursday, Feb. 4 along the northern edge of Bayboro Harbor where a city run-off pipe flows water into the bay.

“We call it a watergoat because goats eat anything,” said SEAS president Stephanie Lawler. “It’s a system of buoys almost like what you would see in a pool. Underneath there is a netting system that is lined with a series of different weights.”

Lawler led a small dedication on Thursday, Feb. 4 as the new watergoat was getting installed.

New Earth Industries installed a watergoat at Brooker Creek, which also feeds into Bayboro Harbor, that students have been maintaining for more than a year. Student volunteers have maintained the watergoat by taking kayaks into the harbor to pull out trash caught by the device. This process will continue with the new watergoat.

“We try to have it cleaned once a week,” Lawler said. “Normally when it starts to get into the rainy season, we may do it twice a week depending on the storms. Other than that, we have the monthly cleanups. We kayak over and do the watergoat and the mangroves behind it.”

SEAS students have removed an estimated 2,250 pounds of trash from the harbor, and they expect to increase that number exponentially with the addition of the new watergoat. Trash and debris stopped by the watergoats flow from the city's runoff system that picks up trash from as far inland as Tropicana Field.

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program funds supported the purchase of pickers, gloves, a storage shed, first-aid and sanitation supplies, trash bags and the new watergoat.

"To get the grant, we had to have almost ten letters of recommendation," said Lawler. "This is a project that we were going outside for funding, so it's totally free to the school."

The new watergoat has a nutrient lining that removes contaminants from the water as water passes through the lining. Both the old and new watergoats have large netting systems that do not reach the bottom except at extremely low tides, making it easy for fish and other aquatic animals to pass through it unaffected. Watergoats act like skimmers, stopping the trash that floats on the surface into the bay.

SEAS members are committed to community action and raising awareness of environmental issues happening in St. Petersburg. SEAS has educational days with elementary students from the community and sponsors a monthly lecture series with other student organizations that cover a range of environmental issues affecting the state of Florida.

SEAS meetings and cleanups are open to all USFSP students and anyone who wants to be involved with keeping USFSP and the community clean and environmentally friendly. For more information or to participate in SEAS at USF St. Petersburg, please visit their web site.

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