

The official magazine of the Las Olas Association | May 2023
A City of Fort Lauderdale recognized business association.

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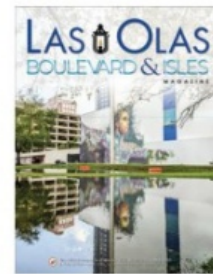
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'beauty after the storm'

LAS OLAS BOULEVARD & ISLES MAGAZINE is the official bimonthly magazine of the Las Olas Association providing our local homeowners, residents, businesses and professionals in the Las Olas Boulevard corridor with relevant local news, civic updates and events information specifically and exclusively focused on our east Las Olas Boulevard business and residential community. Written and produced by Las Olas locals, the magazine is published bimonthly and mailed directly to ALL residential and business addresses throughout the east Las Olas Boulevard corridor and Las Olas Isles area. Additional free distribution is provided via the Las Olas Association member network, advertisers and at special special events.

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Special Feature

DEFENDING OUR WATERWAYS

Resilience Matters



Mangrove Reef Wall panel attachments to private home in Fort Pierce

WHAT'S NEXT?

Fort Lauderdale's waterways and beaches are priceless to our local community. The boat show alone brings in over \$1 billion to the local economy. Tourists and local residents enjoy swimming at our beautiful beaches, paddleboarding and kayaking throughout our 165 miles of navigable waterways. Fishing lines are cast daily from land and offshore. Our Venice of America is booming.

But sadly, like the waters in Venice, our waters are consistently being contaminated from broken sewer line spills, storm-water runoff, live-aboard dumping, plastics, fertilizer, landscape waste, and other harmful contaminants. In our recent historic flooding event alone, bacteria in our canals and waterways

surged from 38 to 144 times higher than levels the EPA deems safe for swimming.

We all remember the over 200 million gallons of toxic waste that spilled into our streets, rivers and canals back in December 2019 and early 2020. The State fined Fort Lauderdale \$2.1 million because of it. According to the Sun Sentinel, this was not only the largest spill, but the largest penalty in our state's history. The city was given the option to put that fine money towards more than \$3.1 million worth of future environmental restoration projects. Qualifying projects could include mangrove restoration, updating seawalls and water quality projects, but could not be used to repair pipes.

Special Feature continued

Waterways Quality and the City

Our Fort Lauderdale waterways are Florida Department of Environmental Protection Class III Waters, designated for recreational activities and maintaining a healthy and well balanced marine eco-system.

"Waterway quality continues to be a City Commission priority," says Dr. Nancy Gassman, Assistant Director of Public Works and Sustainability for the City of Fort Lauderdale. "In lieu of the \$3.1 million fine, the city proposed three in-kind projects with water quality features estimated at a value of \$4.6 million. The three projects included the River Oaks Neighborhood Stormwater Improvements, the Edgewood Neighborhood Stormwater Improvements and the restoration of the Osceola Creek from SW 32nd Place to Marina Boulevard."

Realizing our contaminated water could be creating a health hazard, in January 2021, our city hired the Miami Waterkeeper water-quality monitoring program to test for bacteria levels in our waterways. Ten sites were chosen based on high contamination levels and those with the highest rate of recreational activity. Those sites are Annie Beck Park, Coontie Hatchee Park, the Himmarshee Canal, Lake Sylvia, Middle River/George English Park, Royal Palm Drive, the Sandbar, Sunrise Bay, Hugh Taylor Birch Park, Sweeting Park, and Tarpon River.

Test results data can be found on the Miami Waterkeeper website, or on the Swim Guide App (see below). Sites that test consistently high for bacteria are Annie Beck Park, the Himmarshee Canal, Sweeting Park, Tarpon River, and Cootie Hatchie Park.

When asked how the city is responding to those areas that frequently test high, Dr. Gassman said "While the city is awaiting the final Miami Waterkeeper annual report for 2022, designated water-sport activity areas consistently have

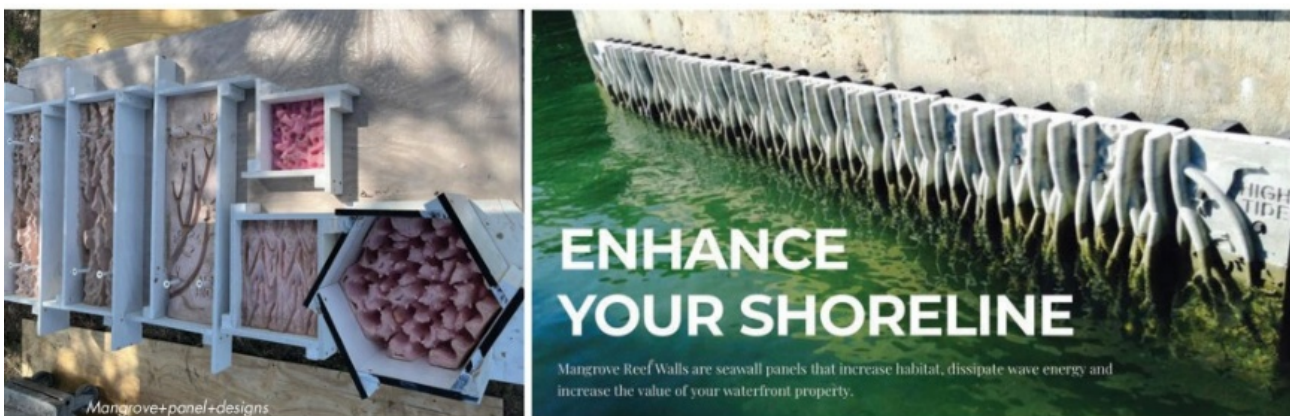
bacteria levels that meet the more stringent EPA standard for swimming beaches. The more inland sites have greater impacts from urban runoff, especially after rain events, and are less often compliant with the FDEP Class III water standards for bacteria."

According to Dr. Gassman, the city has accomplished a number of clean up initiatives throughout our waterways since 2020. From the \$200 million new storm water infrastructure investment, to dredging and installing aerators at specific contaminated sites.

Green-Gray Living Seawalls show solutions and mitigation promise

Several of Fort Lauderdale's neighboring cities along the Intracoastal are experimenting with an approach known as "Green-Grey" infrastructure. Green-Gray infrastructure combines conservation and/or restoration of ecosystems with the selective use of conventional engineering approaches to provide people with solutions that deliver climate change resilience and adaptation benefits. According to FEBA, (Friends of Ecosystem-based Adaptation), a founding member of the Global Green-Gray Infrastructure Community of Practice, led by Conservation International, a hybrid approach can generate more benefits and climate resiliency for people and nature than either strategy applied alone.

Here in Fort Lauderdale and many other coastal cities, seawalls are used as the first line of defense against rising seas. With the threat of rising sea levels more evident today than ever before, new height requirements for seawalls have already been enacted and may even be raised again. This means more seawall updating projects throughout our city for both the public and private sector, including projects on our Las Olas Isles, i.e. Hendricks Isle, Lido Drive, Merle Fogg Park, San Marco Drive and Coral Way.



Special Feature continued

Ironically, while well-intended, continuing to raise and fortify these seawall structures can also have unintended effects, such as increasing wave energy and erosion, which, in turn, can dramatically reduce marine habitat. Sea-level rise will also result in higher storm surges, increased risk for flooding (as we continue to see) and an increasingly rapid rate of erosion of coastal habitat, all of which can be potentially damaging to valuable public and private development.

Green-Gray engineering approaches to many of these grey cement seawall projects have shown great promise in offsetting the negative effects of the cement structure and can actually contribute to less damaging wave action and improved water quality and marine habitat. And adding living material such as oysters, mussels, seagrasses and maintained mangroves to seawall tiles brings additional benefits. When these organisms are added to the panels that are properly attached to or installed in front of new or already existing seawalls, they not only aid water quality conditions and the marine ecosystems, they also provide significant wave energy dissipation and erosion control.

A renewed and increasing appreciation for mangroves

Mangroves, which can now be professionally maintained, are included in many of these green-enhancement projects. These highly adaptable and durable tropical shrubs and trees are the superheroes of our environment. They are the gift that keeps on giving, providing immeasurable benefits: from their positive role in fisheries, to improving water quality by filtering out unwanted pollutants such as our hugely problematic fertilizer runoff. Mangroves also capture massive amounts of carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. And on top of all that, they help mitigate storm surge wave energy and coastal flooding.

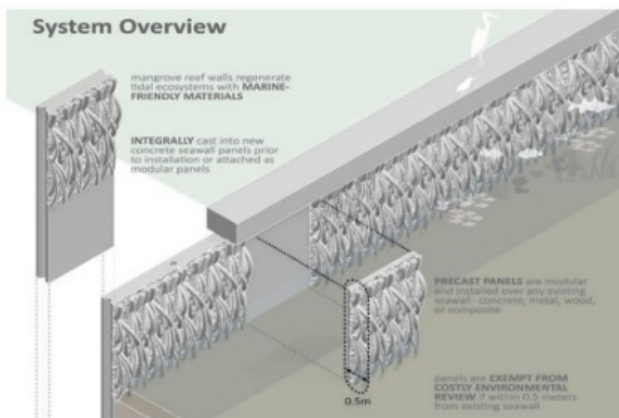
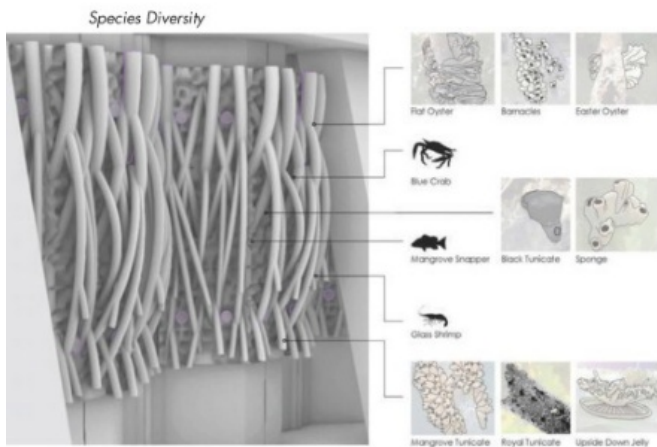
When asked about including mangroves in future waterway restoration and coastal flood mitigation projects Dr. Gassman said, "We hope to secure funding in 2024 for an Urban Forestry Master Planning process to identify areas and techniques for tree canopy improvement and specifically identify locations where mangrove habitat enhancements would be appropriate and feasible."

Mangroves, living-seawalls and hybrid reef designs are just some of the many innovative green/grey resiliency projects currently underway in many coastal cities here in the United States and throughout the world. U.S. cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, New York and many of our own neighboring cities such as Miami, Tampa, Sarasota and Pompano Beach, are all joining in to prove eco-engineering can help mitigate storm surge and help restore our priceless oceans and waterways.

What the specialists and experts in the field are saying

"South Florida is an incredible environment, but, unfortunately, it's in decline," say Dr. Keith Van de Riet, AIA. Dr. Van de Riet is an award-winning professor who was affiliated with Florida Atlantic University until 2015 and is currently at the University of Kansas. Dr. Keith added: "A large part of the reason for this is how we build. There's virtually no natural habitat along the waterways, where seawalls and bulkheads have replaced tidal ecosystems. I've watched mullet literally jumping against seawalls trying to evade predators. Along these waterways, mangrove shorelines and oyster reefs would have been the dominant features until the canals were dredged and developed."

There are a variety of living seawall options. University of Miami is experimenting with a modular marine estuary system they call "SEAHIVE". Dr. Landolf Rhode-Barbarigos, who is an Assistant Professor of Civil & Architectural Engineering at University of Miami, says: "SEAHIVE elements are



manufactured using sustainable concrete mixtures and non-corrosive reinforcement." This kind of structure lies below the waterline allowing water to flow through hollow hexagonal concrete units, which lowers storm surge energy. The top can be filled with soil to grow coastal vegetation such as mangroves, providing even more protection from storm surge as well as improving the marine environment.

Dr. Landolf added: "There is a great need for sustainable and efficient solutions for shoreline protection and SEAHIVE is a solution in our portfolio, but there are also many other ideas and green technologies under development. We are excited to collaborate with the local communities on SEAHIVE projects and beyond."

Neighboring cities such as Pompano Beach's Wahoo Bay's Educational Marine Park, and North Bay Village in Miami Dade are currently working with Dr. Landolf and his team as part of their cities' green engineering alternative program.

Dr. Keith Van de Rief's company, Mangrove Reef Walls, emerged from a research project focused on living seawalls. "My company, (which has a number of active pilot projects here in South Florida), is working on saltwater and freshwater living walls and panels to create habitat, improve water quality and dissipate wave energy, as well as enhance the appearance of constructed shorelines," says Dr. Keith. "We have multiple ways to install them. They can be precast panels attached to an existing seawall, or cast in-place over an existing seawall, or installed integrally with a new seawall." These seawall panels mimic form and function of red mangrove tree roots and oyster reefs that occur naturally in Florida and are made from marine-friendly concrete, creating habitat niches for juvenile crabs, snails, fish, and others to escape predators.

"A single oyster can filter between 20-50 gallons of water per day, but during the 20th Century, oysters in U.S. coastal waters declined by nearly 90% - and up to 99% percent in the Fort Lauderdale area," added Dr. Keith. "A constructed oyster reef just 100 feet long, placed across a single waterfront

Rendering of SEAHIVE installation at Wahoo Bay including the modular concrete structures and mangroves to be planted on them.



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Special Feature continued

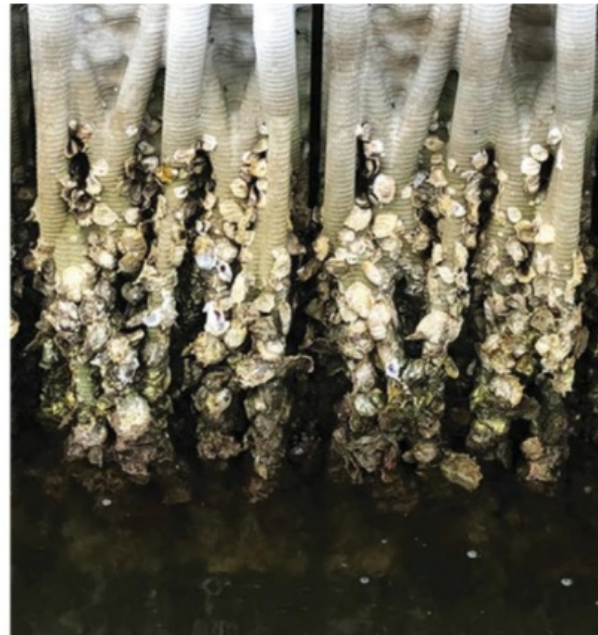


Rendering showing what Wahoo Bay, a sunken park planned for Hillsboro Inlet near Pompano Beach, might look like when built. The project will feature SEAHIVE technology from the University of Miami.

property, could filter almost a million gallons of water in a day. Think about the compound effect we could have if we installed these across even a fraction of the hundreds miles of waterway edge in Greater Fort Lauderdale.”

So what can we do?

Since our waterways and beaches are the heart of our beautiful city, Fort Lauderdale needs to be the leader in restoring and maintaining their strength and vitality.



Many residents live, work and play on these waters and can think back to a time on how clean and clear they used to be. "I remember swimming with my friends in the New River when I was a kid, the water was clear, and the Jungle Queen even threw peanuts at us", says Fort Lauderdale resident Harry Rozelle. It may be a far reach to make these waters safe and swimmable once again, but shouldn't we at least try? Our economy and community may depend on it!

"Our quality of life is directly correlated with the health of our waterways," says Mayor Dean Tantis. "With over 160 miles of navigable waterways in Fort Lauderdale, we must work symbiotically with Mother Nature to achieve the purest and healthiest waters. Living sea walls are an innovative method to protect our lives and property as well as restore and nurture the aquatic ecosystem that we so heavily rely on." 🔥



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzee Bailey resides in the Las Olas Isles and is a newly appointed member of the City of Fort Lauderdale Sustainability Advisory Board. Suzee is also the Founder of Residents for Resilience, a not-for-profit organization whose main goal is to bring important Fort Lauderdale water-related issues to the forefront of public awareness. Her love for water-sport activities and a background in journalism and broadcasting has led to her staunch advocacy for South Florida water quality issues. She shares her love of nature and sports with her husband Hall of Fame Jockey, Jerry Bailey and their son, Justin, an attorney in Fort Lauderdale.



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