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LIVE



MANATEE COUNTY

Manatee County aims to improve water quality through oyster restoration projects

by: [Allyson Henning](#)

Posted: Aug 2, 2022 / 06:52 PM EDT

Updated: Aug 2, 2022 / 06:52 PM EDT

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MANATEE COUNTY (WFLA) — Over the next few years, Manatee County will embark on a large-scale oyster restoration project in the Manatee River. The hope is to enhance water quality long term.

The county wants to get the community involved in the process. Through partnerships with Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, and START or Solutions to Avoid

Red Tide, they're able to help get oyster shells from your dinner plate back into the water to serve a new purpose as a "vertical oyster garden."

After oyster shells go through a six to eight-month quarantine period at Robinson Preserve, volunteers will assemble the shells into vertical oyster gardens.

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"They are built by volunteers. We take shells and just stack them along a stainless steel wire," said Manatee County environmental specialist Shaun Swartz. "The idea is that we attach this under docks and over time, marine life will aggregate on these vertical oyster gardens."

Swartz showed 8 On Your Side how the string of oyster shells transforms once underwater for an extended period of time, becoming home to crabs, worms, snails, and more oysters.





“Science has shown that oysters are able to filter water in our waterways. So the goal here is to get oysters to settle on these vertical oyster gardens and then grow all while filtering the water out here,” explained the environmental specialist. “So not only is this potentially a water quality enhancement project, but it is also a habitat creation project,” he continued.

There is a box at the Nest at Robinson Preserve where members of the public can pick up a vertical oyster garden free of charge. Details on the [installation process](#) under your dock can be found [here](#).

“Florida by all accounts is a paradise to live. It is wonderful here. So I think the community now is more interested than ever in finding ways that they can engage with restoration efforts and finding ways that we can meaningfully enhance water quality and protect what makes Florida so unique,” Swartz said.

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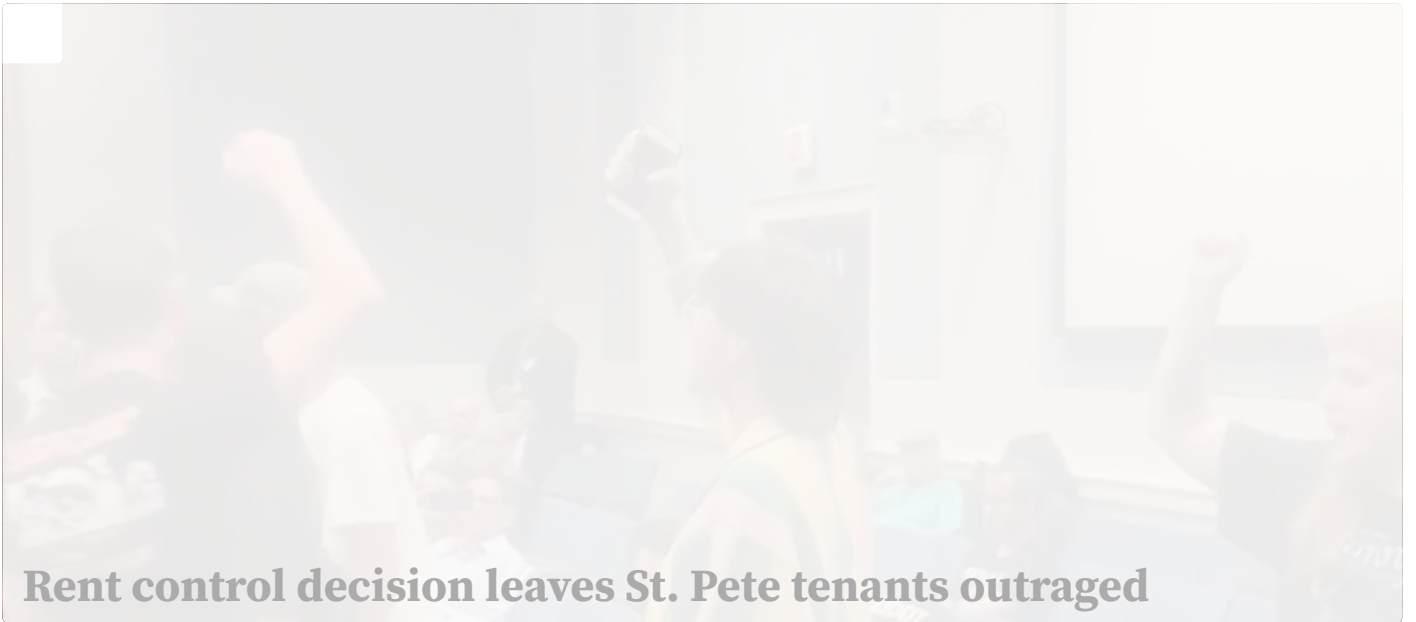
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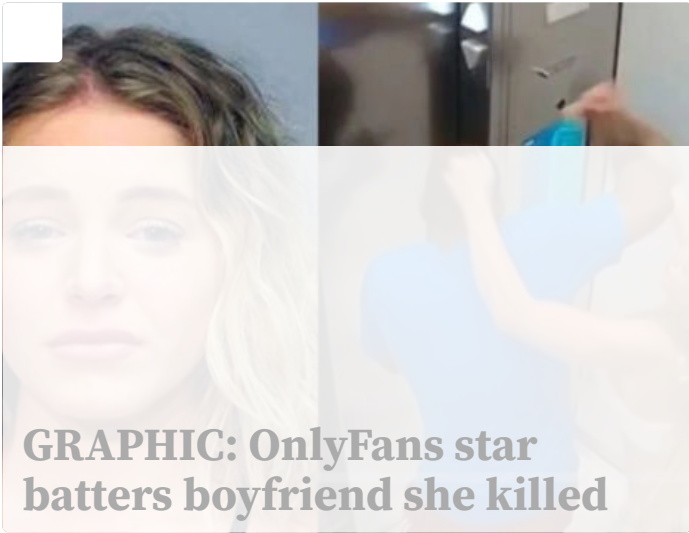
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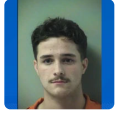
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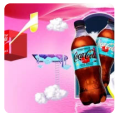
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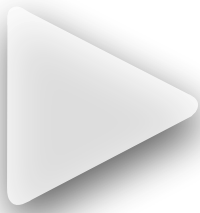
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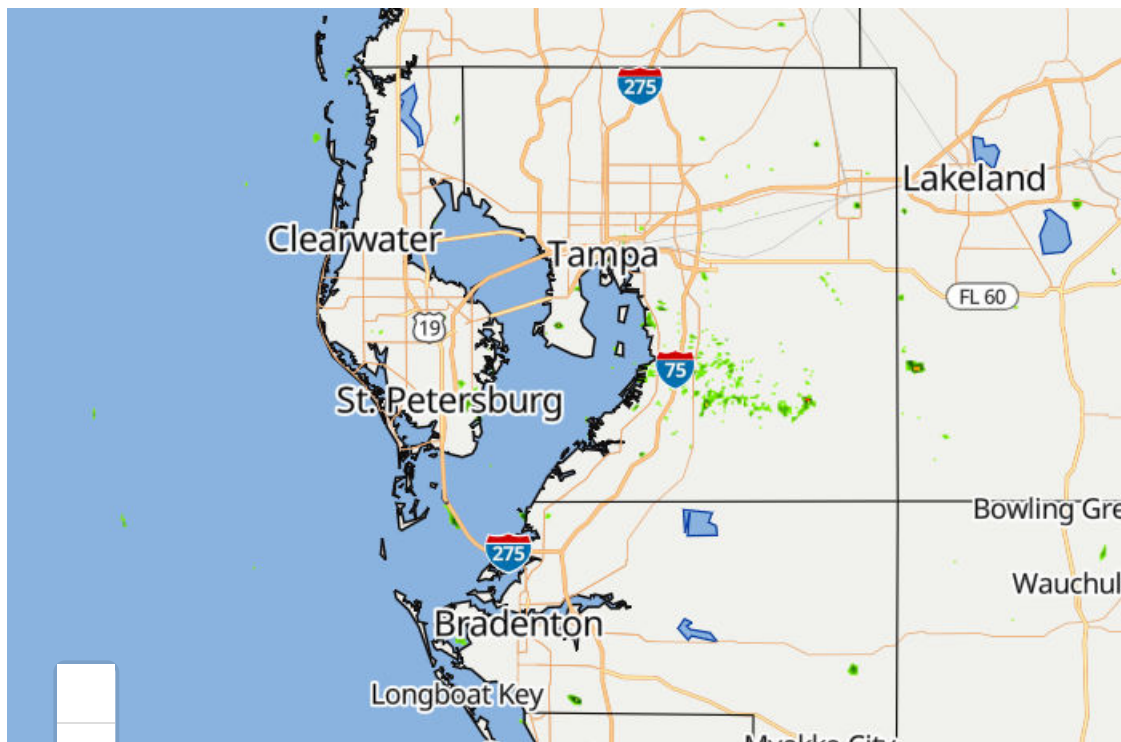
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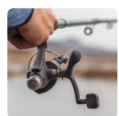
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