



Reel Time: Sarasota Bay Partners Grants offer environmental win/win

By **Rusty Chinnis** - March 6, 2023



Terri Driver emcees as members of Banyon Bay cut the 'ribbon' on the new restoration. – Rusty Chinnis | Sun

Sarasota Bay Partners Grants are competitive awards for projects in the Sarasota Bay watershed that promote habitat and water quality restoration, environmental education, community involvement and stewardship to improve the overall quality of Sarasota Bay and its tributaries. Stormwater runoff, sewage spills, leaking septic tanks and a thousand other insults threaten the health of Sarasota Bay. Add in warming temperatures, rising sea levels and altered weather patterns, all of which will continue to impact our natural and built environments.

I'm often asked what an individual or a group can do to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem. One way to make a difference is to take advantage of the [Sarasota Bay Estuary Program's](#) Bay Partners Grants. The SBEP was formed with the aim to protect Sarasota Bay and its environment, the economic engine of the region and the reason most of us live here. Local actions like this help prepare our communities and estuary for these changing conditions. There are many opportunities to engage. These include but are not limited to:

- Planting shade trees in highly paved urban areas;
- Installing rain gardens and bioswales to filter runoff from impervious surfaces;
- Diverting gutter downspouts from impervious surfaces to planter boxes, garden beds or other permeable areas, or to rainwater harvesting systems like rain barrels and cisterns; and
- Implementing living shorelines or seawall modifications that will allow mangroves to “migrate upslope.”

Recently, Banyan Bay Condominium on Longboat Key took advantage of a grant to turn an area they had nicknamed the “swamp” into a vibrant area that beautified the grounds, created a natural pollinator garden for birds and insects and helped protect the section of Sarasota Bay that fronts the property. The project was led by residents Terri and Dr. Jeff Driver. Their experience and the outcome are best expressed in Terri’s own words. According to Driver, “We had some uncertainty about whether our proposed project would fit the requirements for a grant from SBEP Partners. A friend recommended we call SBEP and simply ask if they would look at our space and situation and see if it was appropriate for a grant proposal.

“On a very tight timeline and on short notice (because the proposal was due in about two and a half weeks), SBEP grant manager Darcy Young visited our property and evaluated our proposed site, agreeing that it was exactly what would help Sarasota Bay if re-planted to native species. SBEP was very helpful in response time and providing guidance to complete our grant application.

“SBEP recommended a couple of native plant nurseries, but Annie Schiller at Florida Native Plant Nursery was very responsive. On very short notice, Annie visited, evaluated our proposed renovation area and very quickly provided a list of plant species and number to be planted specific to our wet and dry areas. She also reminded us about mulch requirements. We called Annie the morning our proposal was due to make changes and Florida Native Plant Nursery provided updated estimates two hours before our proposal was due. They were very responsive to changes. Once we received the grant, Florida Native Plant Nursery brought the plants in and helped with recommended placement. Our community members planted all 134 plants, creating a new native forest at The Banyan Bay Club.”

On Feb. 27, members of the press and the condo association attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony to dedicate the new space and celebrate their investment in protecting Sarasota Bay while improving the condominium grounds, a true win/win experience.

Although the next grant deadline is a year away (2024), now is an excellent time to plan how you can take advantage of this program and make a difference while enhancing your place in the bay's watershed. For more information and to apply for a grant, go to <https://sarasotabay.org/get-involved/apply-for-a-grant/>.

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