

Bay Fest opens the underwater world to all ages

By [Ian Swaby](#) | 9:00 a.m. September 24, 2023



Izzy Perez, 4, Inka Perez, 7, and Nila Schreiber, 7, discover some stuffed marine life at the Manatee County Natural Resources stand.

Photo by Ian Swaby



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Four-year-old Landon Varsek was among the children enjoying their time at Bay Fest: Exploring Our Underwater World, spending hours dip netting in the bay without ever asking to go home.

Formerly held in recognition of volunteers in the Sarasota Seagrass Survey, a volunteer-driven survey of the area's different seagrasses, this year the event served the wider public when it was held on Sept. 23 at the Sarasota Sailing Squadron facility.

"We wanted to open it up and make it more of a public spectacle, and engage kids and people that didn't necessarily participate, but we thought needed to know about seagrass," said Megan Barry, public outreach manager for the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program. "We have a lot more of a general public than we have in the past two years, and I'm really excited about that."

Barry said the goal of the event, a joint effort between Sarasota County and the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, was to offer something for all ages.

Some offerings included the opportunity to see and touch seahorses, spider crabs, pufferfish and more with the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, free kayaking tours with Wayne Adventures and live music by RhythmTrail.

"I thought it was very good," said Kimberly Scaringe, an education specialist at Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium. "I love the kids. They are so curious about so many things that adults don't notice sometimes. It was well-attended, and it was an absolutely perfect day."



AUTHOR

[Ian Swaby](#)

Ian Swaby is the Sarasota neighbors writer for the Observer. Ian is a Florida State University graduate of Editing, Writing, and Media and previously worked in the publishing industry in the Cayman Islands.

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