

Leaders celebrate a joyous day by the bay

Officials recognize cleanup effort

By Abdon Sidibe

Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 9:30 pm

CRYSTAL RIVER — A nascent public-private cleanup effort in King's Bay was officially christened Wednesday morning.



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

Workers from Gator Dredging use vibrating plate compactors to free sediment from the tops of geotubes that hold water and sediment. Once the sediment in the bags is freed, water flows more freely from the filtration bags.

Several dozen residents, politicians and members of community organization Save Crystal River (SCR), which conceived the project, gathered to shovel a small ceremonial mound of dirt at a staging area behind the city's post office.

SCR's pilot restoration project kick-off featured speeches by state Sen. Charlie Dean, R-Inverness; state Rep. Jimmie T. Smith, also R-Inverness; county commissioners Scott Adams and Joe Meek; Crystal River Primary School Principal Donnie Brown; Citrus County Chamber of Commerce President Josh Wooten; and Crystal River Mayor Jim Farley. Farley also issued a proclamation in support of the cleanup.

"It's amazing," Dean said, taking in the site. "This project is the realization we have all dreamed of. This is my proudest moments. Thanks to the city, county and the many volunteers that have stepped up. This is our future for generations to come."

Dean added that the realization of the project is an illustration of what can happen when you don't just take charge of people, but instead works with people.

Dean and Smith were singled out by Steve Lamb, vice president of SCR, for their hard work and leadership in the acquisition

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of the \$1.6 million grant being used to pay Gator Dredging of Clearwater to vacuum-clean a 3.4-acre portion of the canals abutting the staging area.

SCR officials and others hope the project will become a model of not only how to rid King's Bay of noxious Lyngbya, but a model for other communities facing similar pollution issues.

Lyngbya is stringy material that balls up as it rises to the surface and forms thick mats. Those mats have covered the once-visible sandy bottom of the bay. Following the removal of the muck from the seafloor, workers with Sea and Shoreline of Ruskin will plant a strain of eel grass known as "rock star" to fill the ecological niche the invasive Lyngbya presently occupies. Jim Anderson, the co-owner of Sea and Shoreline, said 360 cages full of eel grass will be planted as part of the project. The 3-foot-by-27-inch cages were invented by Anderson to help revegetate a portion of the Manatee River bottom. The cages are designed to keep manatees from eating the grass until it has an established root system.

"Maintenance is the key in all of this," Anderson said. "You got to stay on it to make sure things are going the way they are supposed to go."

Attendees of the kick-off also were treated to a tour of the operations from the staging area.

Giant hoses suck up muck and water and carry it to a rattler conveyor which shakes and separates the sand, muck and water.

According to Jack Adams, co-owner of Gator Dredging, the muddy water will then travel through another hose to giant geotubes for more cleansing. The giant tubes, full of tiny perforations, help filter thousands of gallons of water. Along the way, a polymer is introduced to the solution which causes the sediment to sink, leaving behind clear water. Crews could be seen on top of the geotubes running vibrating machines to help agitate the mixture and filter the water.

Adams said the system sucks up 2,200 gallons of water per minute. The sand will be given to the county and city for use in beach restoration projects. The Lyngbya also will be put to use as fertilizer by area farmers.

Lisa Moore, president of Save Crystal River, said the project's realization has been an amazing experience.

"I am just so elated about everything," Moore said.

Contact Chronicle reporter A.B. Sidibe at 352-564-2925 or asidibe@chronicleonline.com.