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'Floating island' is designed to clean Gillespie Park pond

BY CHRISTINE HAWES CORRESPONDENT

With the launching Saturday of their largest "floating island" to date into Gillespie Park's pond, Peter and Julia Seyffert hope to trigger a countywide movement to provide greater care for Sarasota's 4,500 retention ponds.

The two are co-owners of Creative Aquascapes Inc., a local company that has recently expanded its koi pond business to present "floating islands" to Sarasota and the entire state.

These pods of foam, made of recycled plastic bottles, hold water plants with substantial roots that work with the foam pod to create havens for healthy microbiotic activity.

The microbes, in turn, get rid of the unhealthy phosphates and nitrates that often overwhelm storm-water retention ponds.

"This is probably the Cadillac of uptaking" the chemicals, said Julia Seyffert as she planted sunshine mimosa, elderberry bushes and sea ox-eye daisies into the 25-cubic-foot platform along with volunteer helper Brian Girard.

Less than an hour later, Sarasota City Commissioner Fredd Atkins joined Peter Seyffert and Girard in dragging the island to the center of Gillespie Pond.

While wading, the three took advantage of the rainwater-depleted pond's waning shores to remove old construction cones and debris.

"I have a special interest in this pond, and in this park," Atkins said. "It's been one of the linchpins to the revitalization of the downtown area."

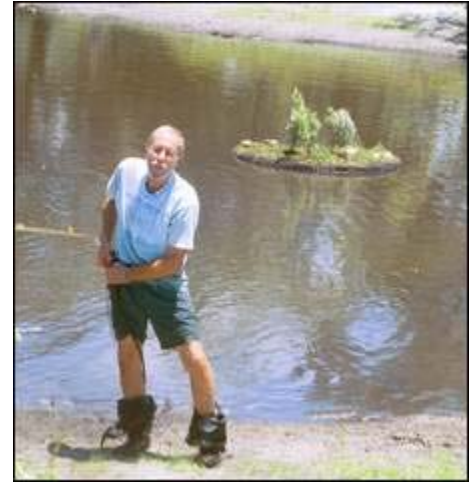
The Seyfferts donated the island to the Gillespie Park Neighborhood Association, which saw the project as a great way to enhance its overall effort to better filter the park's pond and therefore attract more wildlife.

"We're concerned about all storm-water ponds in the county, and in the state," said Don Chaney, a member of the neighborhood association and of the Healthy Gulf Coalition.

"Retention ponds now are basically holes dug to hold rainwater. But they could be a lot more like a wetland."

Though the Seyfferts have floating islands in about seven locations countywide, Saturday's launching was only the second in a public body of water.

Overall, Peter Seyffert said, the county has more than 4,400 retention ponds that could likely benefit from floating islands.



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS / CHRISTINE HAWES

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