



Update on Mercabo Cove ... from the GICIA

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SUBMITTED BY THE GICIA – The GICIA's Mercabo Cove Project continues to move along with the construction team of TSI Disaster Recovery practicing

appropriate CDC guidelines. The current global health situation has made trucking of the fill for the basin a bit of a challenge as a lot of truckers have either been diverted or have made the choice to move products deemed essential such as grocery items. This is not expected to delay the project significantly as there is still much work to be done.

Construction on the Mercabo Cove Restoration Project began on March 2. The project is designed to transform the basin area of the Mercabo Preserve into a marine sanctuary that will provide long-term benefits including improved water quality, enhanced fish and bird habitats, reduced seawall maintenance costs, and visually-enhanced views of the preserve site.

One of the most visible changes currently taking place is the south side of the canal where the "living shoreline" is being created. This is the only section on the site where the seawall will be completely removed in order to create a stabilized and planted shallow area. Reefballs will be used to stabilize the area and native seagrasses will be planted that will gradually transition into an area of native salt-tolerant species such as Spartina grass, mangroves and buttonwood trees. This shallow tidal area will create a much needed habitat for small fish and the visual impact will be significant.



How the property currently looks

As many people know, the Mercabo Site was once the home of Mercury Test Center. When the GICIA purchased the 30-acre parcel it housed nine buildings including dry boat storage, conference center, office and small hotel, room for 185 wet slips, and 4,700 feet of bayfront located at the entrance to Gasparilla Island.

The GICIA's initial vision for this site was to completely restore the uplands to create a visually attractive native bird and wildlife sanctuary that would be forever protected from development. Once the upland restoration was completed, the GICIA began to explore the possibility of creating an aquatic sanctuary by restoring the existing marine basin.

This innovative project, which will enhance habitat for juvenile snook, tarpon, the critically endangered smalltooth sawfish, dolphin and manatee is estimated to cost \$2 million. Thank you to the community for your great support on this environmental restoration.

Not often in today's world do we see this type of transformation from an abandoned industrial site to a detailed uplands restoration and now the creation of an innovative marine sanctuary.

"Today's work at The Mercabo Cove is the final stage of this five-year transformation and it will be very exciting to see the final restoration be completed in the next three or four months," said GICIA President Bruce Carbonari.

If you would like more information on this exciting project, please contact the GICIA Office at 964-2667.



How the property looked before work began.

 http://assets.tumblr.com/images/default_avatar_128.png

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