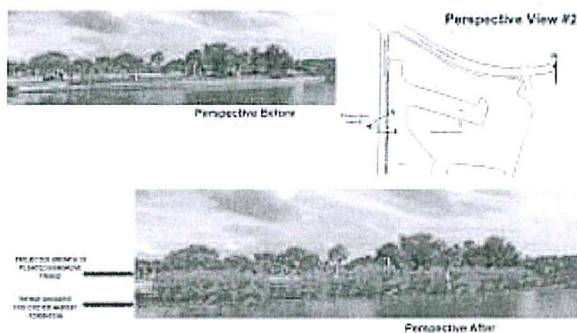




## GICIA construction of Mercabo is now complete

The News December 18, 2020



SUBMITTED BY THE GICIA- The Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association is pleased to announce that the construction phase of the Mercabo Cove restoration project has been completed. The project was designed using innovative techniques to improve water quality, enhance habitat and

reduce long-term seawall maintenance costs. The transformation of the hardened canal into a marine sanctuary is already being enjoyed by an aggregation of manatees.

The GICIA was able to acquire additional fill for the Cove through a donation by the City of Punta Gorda, as they recently completed a dredge project. The additional fill allowed the overall depth of the Cove to be shallowed to -4 Mean Low Water. To improve water circulation at the far east end of the Cove a 100' x 30' flushing channel was excavated between east end of the Cove and the open bay waters of Charlotte Harbor. Once the channel was completed a bridge was constructed to allow continued access to the peninsula can be accessed for maintenance.

The bridge has added visual appeal to the site. It is exciting to already see signs of improvement to water quality and the GICIA is confident they will be able to begin seagrass planting phase in February or March. Seagrasses are highly sensitive and require clear, clean, shallow water to grow. The GICIA has contracted with Sea and Shoreline to plant 3,600 units of seagrass in the Cove basin. They will also monitor and maintain the plantings for 12 months to ensure a success.

The Cove Project, which has been generously supported by residents, utilized innovative techniques such as reef balls, rip rap, and reinforced concrete pipe to reinforce the seawall, enhance fishery habitat, provide surface for oysters to adhere and allow for the planting of mangroves. More than 600 mangroves have been planted around the site. The ones planted in the RCPs will eventually have their extensive root system grow over and around the pipe eventually grow, their root systems will extend over the tops of the RCPs eventually concealing the concrete capsules. The extensive root system creates additional fish habitat and once established the canopy will also provide shade for fish and roosting and/or nesting areas for birds.

As many people know, the Mercabo Site was once the home of Mercury Test Center. When the GICIA originally purchased the 30 acres it housed nine buildings including dry boat storage, conference center, office, small hotel, and room for 185 wet slips. 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 and the Mercabo Cove Restoration Project was born.

This innovative project was estimated to cost \$2 million, and the GICIA is pleased that to see the project completed without going over budget. This unique project will provide enhanced habitat for juvenile snook and tarpon, the critically endangered smalltooth sawfish, and dolphin and manatee. As the GICIA celebrates 50 years working to protect Island Life, take a moment the next time you dive by the site and imagine that site today if there was no GICIA. If you would like more information on this exciting project or becoming a member of the GICIA please contact the GICIA Office at 964-2667.

 POSTED BY OLIVIA CAMERON

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