

Bluffton Today, 12-28-2010

TOWN WRAPS UP RAIN BARREL GRANT PROGRAM

Natural resources manager explains the ins and outs of capturing water runoff.



Photos special to Bluffton Today

Members of the Hilton Head Island/Bluffton Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Class of 2010 install a rain garden in May at the May River Montessori School on Calhoun Street in Old Town.

ON THE NET

Learn more about the town's grant-funded clean water program at www.townofbluffton.com/grant/319grant



This rain garden is by the town's new Building and Grounds facility in Oscar J. Frazier Park.



These two rain barrels in place to capture water from the roof of the May River Montessori School are visible from Calhoun Street.

As part of its May River protection program, the town of Bluffton has nearly wrapped up a program providing rain barrels, and sometimes rain gardens using the captured water from rooftops, across the watershed. As Mayor Lisa Sulka explained in February, when applicants were being sought, "This is an initiative aimed at reducing non-point source

pollution as part of the May River Watershed Action Plan and is a major component of the three-year (EPA Clean Water Act) Section 319 grant won by the town in 2009.”

Non-point source pollution is random runoff which cannot be traced back to its origins. The grant was awarded by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. Kim Jones, town natural resources manager, has answered questions about the program:

Q: How much money went to the program?

A: Of the \$483,500 awarded (in the Section 319 grant), \$53,000 was budgeted for the Rain Barrel/ Rain Garden Project to install 145 rain barrels and 37 rain gardens.

Q: How many barrels and gardens were installed?

A: To date, 137 rain barrels have been installed or were delivered for installation and supplies for 30 rain gardens were delivered.

Q: Who installed them?

A: The majority of rain barrels were installed by the supplier, Palmetto Rain Barrels, as part of the program. A small number of homeowners preferred to install their barrels personally. Rain gardens were installed by the homeowners with technical assistance from the Lowcountry Master Gardeners, except for the May River Montessori rain garden which was installed by the 2010 Hilton Head/Bluffton Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class as part of their class project.

Q: When was it done?

A: The program was completed in two phases. Phase 1 included the installation of rain barrels and was accomplished from July through September. Phase 2 included the distribution of materials to install rain gardens and was accomplished from October into December.

Q: What's left to do?

A: Currently the public component of the project is completed. There are seven gardens and eight barrels scheduled to be installed at town projects — the affordable housing project on Wharf Street and the pocket park at the corner of May River Road and Bluffton Road next to Reclamation By Design.

Q: How many barrels came with rain gardens?

A: All rain gardens required a rain barrel be installed as well, so there are 37 pairs currently and another eight pairs planned for the Town projects mentioned previously.

Q: Why was this done?

A: The S.C. DHEC Section 319 grant work plan includes many initiatives. The installation of rain barrels and gardens in the May River watershed was key for several reasons. First, they help to reduce the flow of stormwater, and the pollutants it can carry, to the May River. Second, they involve the citizens in the solution to the water quality problems we're seeing in the May River. Third, they help reinforce a more sustainable behavior by using captured rain water for watering landscaping.

Q: What will it accomplish?

A: As mentioned above, this project involves citizens in the solution to pollution and thus empowers them — little changes add up to make a big difference. The evidence for this is that the folks who installed the rain barrels are preventing roughly 800,000 gallons of potentially polluted stormwater from reaching the May River annually.

.... This estimate was derived by the following calculation: The number of rain barrels installed times 55 gallons (barrel capacity) times 52 weeks times 2 (which assumes the barrels are filled twice each week) = total gallons of runoff annually prevented from reaching the May River. (137 barrels X 55 gallons X 52 weeks X 2 = 783,640 gallons currently, and 145 barrels X 55 X 52 X 2 = 829,400 gallons once the last eight barrels are installed for town projects in spring/summer 2011).

.... I know it sounds like a lot, but I've seen some of the barrels mostly full just on dew.

Q: Originally this was planned for the Old Town Historic District only. Why was it expanded to cover a larger area, and what was the distribution in and out of Old Town?

A: The National Register Historic District of Old Town Bluffton was the initial site for the rain barrel/garden demonstration project. However, the town received a number of applications from outside the Historic District and Mayor Sulka felt it was important to include as many greater Bluffton residents as possible. In the end, we received 38 applications for 80 rain barrels and 23 gardens in Old Town and 55 applications for 65 rain barrels and 14 rain gardens outside of Old Town.

Q: Were they all in the town limits?

A: Not all applicants are town of Bluffton residents as this is not a grant requirement. All are residents of the May River Watershed however, which is a grant requirement. Of the 93 applicants, 63 were town of Bluffton residents and 30 were not.

Q: When was the application period?

A: The Town began to accept applications in January of this year and continued to accept them on a first come, first served basis until all supplies were committed and then began a wait list.

Q: Will the town be doing any more of these?

A: The town is currently evaluating the budget for the project to determine if there are additional funds to supply those on the wait list with a rain barrel at least. If there is continued interest, the Town may seek additional funding sources as part of the May River Watershed Action Plan initiative.

Q: Where in or around Bluffton can someone buy a rain barrel on their own?

A: There are a number of ways folks can get a rain barrel, and the town does not recommend one over another. However, individual suppliers include Gary Pierce (Palmetto Rain Barrels) and Russ Charek (Lowcountry Rain Barrels); large retailers that can have barrels ordered include Home Depot and Lowe's.

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