Oyster Garden Installations

■ *Work is now underway on installing **Oyster Gardens** at docks in the Lemon Bay watershed as part of **Lemon Bay Conservancy's** "One Dock at a Time" program. An oyster garden consists of oyster shells strung together and hung in the water column to provide a base for passing oyster larvae to attach and grow.*

Why do we want to grow oysters?

■ *Recycled oyster shells strung onto marine grade rope provide a habitat for new oyster larvaie to cling to and mature into adult oysters.*

Oysters play a major role in filtering the water and provide important habitat for other marine species. The more oysters that can be grown in Lemon Bay, the closer Lemon Bay Conservancy will be to our goal of restoring the bay to its healthy, diverse natural state.

*How are the oyster gardens created? **TJ's Market Grille** restaurant on Placida Road has generously contributed recycled oyster shells from their kitchen to be cleaned, cured and assembled by Lemon Bay Conservancy volunteers. After cleaning, a drill press is used to drill a hole in each shell. Then, the shells are strung onto marine grade wire and rope.*

To deploy the oyster gardens, a stainless eye hook is installed to attach each oyster garden strand to the dock. Locations are carefully chosen to ensure that the hanging gardens are out of the path of people and vessels using the dock. Once grown, oysters from the gardens will be returned to the bay to help replenish the once-teeming oyster population that has been decimated by disease, poor water quality and over harvesting.

If you have access to a dock on Lemon Bay or a connecting tidal waterway, you can become a citizen scientist and work to improve our water quality by hanging and monitoring an oyster garden. Call the Lemon Bay Conservancy office at (941) 830-8922 to register. LBC volunteers will schedule a time to come out and install your oyster garden!

■ *Lemon Bay Conservancy's volunteers stringing up recycled shells and completed strands of being hung on a dock in a tidal location.*   *Photos submitted*