

## Sarasota Bay Watch a valuable asset

Sarasota Bay Watch is making quite a splash as an asset to the bay and the community after only a year of operation.

The sponsor of the Second Annual Sarasota Bay Great Scallop Search on Saturday, the not-for-profit group organized a boating event that went off without a hitch, assembling equipment and providing training for volunteer snorkelers to count scallops in the bay and report their findings.

Last year's inaugural event, even with rain and murky water, was a success, with 62 volunteers on 31 boats finding about 900 scallops.

Nearly three times as many people showed up this year, with 170 people on 50 boats finding 131 scallops.

The event attracted families who enjoyed a morning on the bay doing their part to help scallop research, followed by a delicious lunch provided by the Chiles Group's Mar Vista restaurant. It was an opportunity to meet other people in the community, as volunteers who arrived by car were assigned to boats with extra room.

While some left without finding a single scallop, everyone got the chance to do some snorkeling in sparkling Sarasota Bay, turning up clams, whelks and other finds, and catching the occasional glimpse of a dolphin.

Slim scallop pickings don't mean that Sarasota Bay is polluted - it's not unusual for scallop populations to fluctuate from year to year, with predators and other factors affecting the sensitive animal. But fertilizer runoff into the bay, which can affect scallops and other marine life, is one of the issues that Sarasota Bay Watch monitors. It is also all the more reason for local governments to adopt ordinances to control fertilizer application and subsequent runoff that poisons the water and kills sea life.

Perhaps one day, thanks in part to Sarasota Bay Watch and their volunteers, the laws will change to allow people to scallop in Sarasota Bay again for real.