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## Florida Oceanographic receives two Environmental Stewardship awards



FLORIDA OCEANOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Dr. Vincent Encomio, Director of Scientific Research at Florida Oceanographic Society, spearheads efforts to restore the oyster population in the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.

**By Samantha Griemsmann**  
YourNews contributor

**STUART**— Florida Oceanographic Society and Anna Bergalis, FOS volunteer, both received awards at the recent Environmental Stewardship Awards hosted by Keep Martin Beautiful. Every year, organizations and individuals in the community are recognized for their efforts to promote environmental stewardship through education and action. This year, Florida Oceanographic Society was awarded for its Oyster Restoration Program (FL.O.O.R.) and Anna Bergalis received the Un-Sung Hero award.

### **Non-Profit Award: Florida Oceanographic Oyster Restoration Program (FL.O.O.R.)**

Since 2006, Florida Oceanographic Society has been coordinating a shell recycling program, collecting approximately 25 tons of used oyster, clam, and mussel shell annually from 10 restaurants in Martin County and the City of Stuart. This is material that would otherwise go into a landfill, but is instead used to create oyster reef habitat in the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie River.

To date, more than 2,000 volunteers of all ages have dedicated more than 5,400 hours to this program. As a result, FL.O.O.R. has increased community awareness of the importance of oyster reefs as well as strengthening a volunteer's sense of stewardship for the habitat and overall ecosystems in which it exists.

This program has seen remarkable growth and success over the years. Support from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Martin County and the City of Stuart, as well as 10 partner restaurants (Conchy Joe's Seafood, Spoto's Oyster Bar, Fresh Catch, Mulligan's, District Table & Bar,

Hog Snappers, Riverwalk Café & Oyster Bar, The Twisted Tuna, Shrimper's, and Magic Oyster), continue to help operate this very successful program.

### **Un-Sung Hero Award: Anna Bergalis, Florida Oceanographic Society volunteer**

Bergalis has been a dedicated and passionate volunteer at Florida Oceanographic Society since 1999 and was recognized with an Un-Sung Hero award. Every week, she cleans algae from the Coastal Center's largest exhibit, the Gamefish Lagoon. Her work has been essential for establishing the area as a seagrass nursery (with a self-sustaining population of seagrass). Seagrass grown in the Gamefish Lagoon will serve as a donor source for future restoration in the Indian River Lagoon and her continued work will help the organization's success flourish.

For more information about oyster restoration efforts or volunteer opportunities at Florida Oceanographic Society, visit <http://www.Florida-Ocean.org> or call 772-225-0505.