

## Participation of Heritage Oaks in the START (Solutions To Avoid Red Tide) Program

START is a non-profit program operating with the support of several governmental agencies to work with Associations to reduce the amount of pollutants and other chemicals going into Florida's tributaries and hence into the Bays of the Gulf coast. The Healthy Pond Collaborative (HPC) of START has granted Heritage Oaks several grants to plant aquatic plants in the littoral zone of our lakes. We are one of only a few associations receiving these grant, which is \$34,000 (approximately 22,700 plants) over 4 years. The condition of receiving these grants is that we are participating in creating buffer zones along our lake borders. The use of buffer zones and littoral plantings are the foundation of what is called the Healthy Pond (Lakes) Initiative endorsed by Sarasota County. The attempt is to restore aging association lakes (stormwater ponds) into ecologically sustainable waterbodies that minimize the use of chemical maintenance and provide a healthier water condition as waters empty into tributaries. As a companion to the START grants, we are receiving free water chemical analyses by U of F (equivalent of \$12,000 per year), and Suncoast Waterkeepers (\$6,000 in each of 2 years).

*Where is the Heritage Oaks project with START taking place?*

The Association that was an early subscriber to the Healthy Lakes Initiative was the Golf Villas. Thanks to their cooperation, we were able to develop buffer zones along Lakes #3 (alongside the 4<sup>th</sup> fairway) and #6 (alongside the 5<sup>th</sup> fairway). The Golf Course was already helping with the buffer zone concept, so, together with the Golf Villas, we established the necessary buffer zone around the perimeter of Lakes #3 and #6. With additional funding from START, we proceeded with plantings in Lake #12 along Mahogany Ave and Lake #24 along Hyland Hills. Aquatic Plants were planted in clumps in the littoral zone of all lakes with the intent of the plants spreading along the littoral zone at the perimeter of each lake.

*What will our lakes look like once the plants take hold and begin flourishing?*

We are using 3 plant species that are recommended by Sarasota County. They are Duck Potato (also called Arrowhead), Gulf Spike Rush, and Pickerel Weed (not really a weed). All three are depth dependent and cannot spread into the deeper waters, thus being constrained to the littoral zone. They grow to only 3-3<sup>1/2</sup> feet high and will not impede the desired aesthetics and views of residents. Once established, they will provide several benefits ranging from protecting the shoreline, assimilating chemicals and nutrients clearing the water and avoiding algae blooms, to providing good habitat for fish and other aquatic life as well as for shore birds.

