25 Years of Restoring the Bay Every Day
A letter by Peter A. Clark, President of Tampa Bay Watch, Inc.

Tierra Verde, FL - Tampa Bay Watch, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Tampa Bay estuary, is proud to celebrate its 25th anniversary this year. Peter A. Clark, their founder and President, would like to express his gratitude by sharing a few words to kick off this special year.

"We at Tampa Bay Watch often hear the accolades on the wonderful habitat restoration projects and water quality improvements that have been made in Tampa Bay. But the truth is that the core of our organizational development has always been and will continue to be energizing the community, young and old, to take a leading role in the recovery of the Bay. It was those early projects in the 1990s that really instilled in our hearts that people really, truly wanted to make a difference in the Tampa Bay estuary, if they only knew how. And that led to the formation of Tampa Bay Watch in 1993. A small group of environmentalists and educators providing the critical science and coordination necessary to create projects, and inviting community groups, schools, youth programs and others to do the hands-on construction.

Essentially we have stayed true to the mission, oh but how we have matured over the years. Our award-winning and often duplicated Bay Grasses in Classes program laid the groundwork for development of our education programs at the Tampa Bay Watch Marine Center. Fifteen years old, I still consider the Marine Center new as it now serves as our base of operations, providing new educational platforms, organizational offices, staging area for restoration projects, and social and friendraising opportunities. What a blessing to grow a marine science facility on the shores of the Bay, exactly where we need to be….

All of you who have participated in our habitat restoration projects know that we have only just begun. It is easy and important to point out how far we have come – water quality best in the bay since the 1950s, seagrass having recovered 20,000 new acres since the 1980s, and fish and wildlife are returning to the bay as a result of these improvements. Yet we face a continued population growth that threatens to undermine the achievements we all have grown to enjoy. One of my greatest concerns is the separation of our children from the natural environment. So many students that have come to Tampa Bay Watch as part of their field trips have never been on a boat before, or to one of our many wonderful beaches. It is so hard to imagine, but it is a reality for many. What we consider gains in technology are removing the next generation from enjoying the amazing resources right in our backyards. How can we expect our children to continue to protect the bay if they do not learn to love it?

And that is the challenge of Tampa Bay Watch moving forward. While involving the community in bay protection activities 25+ years ago was the seed of our institution, addressing the critical need for the next generation to experience and understand the value of a healthy bay is essential. Join us as we begin the next chapter of our organization -- as always it will be the community that truly makes the difference."

Learn how you can get involved in Tampa Bay Watch at tampabaywatch.org and stay tuned for several engaging activities throughout the year in commemoration of their 25th anniversary celebration.

Tampa Bay Watch is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) stewardship program dedicated exclusively to the charitable and scientific purpose of protecting and restoring the marine and wetland environments of the Tampa Bay estuary encompassing over 400 square miles of open water and 2,300 square miles of highly- developed watershed. Tampa Bay Watch involves more than 10,000 youth and adult volunteers each year in hands on habitat restoration projects. For more information, visit www.tampabaywatch.org, or call 727-867-8166.

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