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**Port Tampa Bay – Environmental Improvement Award Application**

**Summary of the project or program:**

Port Tampa Bay (PTB) hosted our first-annual Great Port Clean-up in honor of Earth Day, April 22, 2021. During this inaugural event, port partners and other dedicated community volunteers safely remove trash and marine debris from several sites in and around our port. While the majority of this debris originates from outside of the port, we recognize our daily connection with our local waters and are dedicated to doing our part to eliminate marine debris and support trash-free waters in Tampa Bay. This event was a call to action for the port community to support the ongoing efforts to keep Tampa Bay a beautiful place to live, work, and play.  
The inaugural event was a great success! Led by Port Tampa Bay and the Propeller Club of Tampa, in partnership with Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful, some 342 volunteers from various local industries and community groups, removed over 19,000 pounds (9.6 tons) of debris from our local waters. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we purposefully limited the size of the groups and strategically located the volunteers in safe areas where large amounts of trash have accumulated. The Port community really stepped up for this event, with enthusiasm, sponsorships, and encouraging their employees and family members to volunteer for the clean-up. Several of Port Tampa Bay’s tenants took part in the event and led individual teams as site captains. Even with the challenges of social distancing and keeping participants safe during a global pandemic, the number of volunteers who participated and the amount of debris removed is significant. The Port community, Port Tampa Bay staff, Port commissioners and our partners at Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful have enthusiastically begun planning for the event next year and intend to make it an annual tradition. We fully anticipate the number of volunteers and marine debris removed will continue to grow in the years to come.

**Goals and objectives**  
The goal of this event is to remove debris such as plastic bottles, Styrofoam, tires, scrap wood, grocery bags, and other floatable debris and from the waters and adjacent lands in-and-around the Port. The objective is to engage the Port community and our local partners to remove marine debris and bring attention to ongoing issue of marine debris that affects our communities and affects our environment. Going forward, Port Tampa Bay will continue to be a leader in the elimination of marine debris and the annual Great Port Clean-up will be a shining example of how the Maritime community is dedicated to environmental improvement.  **Discussion  
Background**

As one of the first Ports in the nation to have a dedicated Environmental Department, Port Tampa Bay is deeply committed to environmental sustainability and natural resource protection. PTB is located on Tampa Bay, Florida’s largest open water estuary and an estuary of national significance. Like many urban waterbodies, Tampa Bay is unfortunately plagued with significant amounts of marine debris and litter in the surrounding uplands.

PTB’s Director of Environmental Affairs serves as a member of the Board of Trustees for Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful (KTBB), and affiliate of Keep America Beautiful (KAB). KTBB is consistently one of the top performing affiliates of KAB often win awards for their volunteer base and innovative projects. KTBB and their partners, including PTB, are very involved with the Trash Free Waters Initiative through the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Trash Free Waters Program encourages community residents to be vigilant in protecting the waterways towards a more beautiful Tampa Bay.

The Trash Free Waters Program is a call to action to create more sustainable communities, counteract behaviors and prevent activities that pose water quality issues and habitat concerns in Florida. Volunteer-based projects significantly reduce or eliminate the volume of litter and debris entering the Watershed.   
As a member of the KTBB Board of Trustees, the PTB Environmental Director is intimately involved in this program and helps set goals and policies that fulfill their mission. PTB staff and other Port community leaders have volunteered and taken on leadership roles on many annual coastal clean-ups and anti-littering campaigns. PTB’s Board of Commissioners signed a proclamation committing our organization to support “Trash Free Waters in Tampa Bay”.   
Our focus on the Trash Free Waters campaign grew recently with our adoption of a Water Goat™, at the mouth of a creek that historically delivered polluted water and significant debris into Tampa Bay. The Water Goat™ is an innovative device made with a series of shallow nets and buoys to trap floatable debris before it enters the Bay. Port Tampa Bay and our contractors regularly service the device and remove the floatable debris from the waterway. We have a long-term commitment with KTBB to maintain the Water Goat™. Last year the Water Goat™ removed more than 2,000 pound of floatable debris and prevented it from reaching Tampa Bay.   
PTB’s Environmental Director Chris Cooley proposed the idea of an annual Great Port Clean-up to Debbie Evenson, Executive Director of KTBB in late 2019. He also began developing the concept with Port leadership, including Port President/CEO Paul Anderson, members of the Propeller Club, and other members of the Port community. The concept of an annual Great Port Clean-up event was strongly supported by Port leadership and the Port community.   
The Propeller Club of Tampa expressed interest in being involved in the planning and marketing of the event early on and it was decided that Port Tampa Bay and the Propeller Club would lead the event, with Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful offering materials and liability protections. In early 2021, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful and PTB’s Environmental Director discussed options for an Earth Day event and decided to put the planning of the event into motion.

**Objectives and methodology**

The objective was to plan and implement the first annual Great Port Clean-up event in a safe and responsible manner. Several logistical issues needed to be worked out, especially Covid-19 precautions and Port security issues. Due to Covid-19 concerns and Port security concerns, it was decided to limit the size of the event and the number of volunteers at each clean-up location. It was decided that KTBB would open two sites near the Port for a limited number of volunteers (30 x 2 = 60) from the public to sign up. PTB’s Environmental Director selected other potential “individual” sites via an aerial review of possible clean-up locations based upon prior site visits, prior clean-up events, port secured areas, and his knowledge of local waters. The idea was that individual teams from the Port community would lead these additional sites.

PTB’s Environmental Director drafted a notice and invitation for the event, including the time, date, purpose, safety precautions, and a call to action to the Port community. A website link was provided for the public to sign up at the two KTBB sites and contact information for PTB’s Environmental Director for those who were interested in forming their own volunteer clean-up team. The notice was sent via email to all 500+ Propeller Club members, members of the media and PTB tenants and community partners. Opportunities to sponsor the event were also included in the notice and processed through KTBB to help pay for materials, giveaways, and the custom T-shirts. The response from the community was inspiring and swift. The two open KTBB sites filled up with a few days and dozens of sponsorship commitments came to KTBB and PTB.

The focus then became on the “individual” sites that were selected by PTB’s Environmental Director. He did a site visit to each of the potential individual sites to verify the amount of trash and address any safety issues. Each individual site would need a site captain and some sites within the Port would need Port security clearance. Within a week of the first notice of the event, we had over a dozen groups that wanted to participate and manage their own site. This included a diverse group of volunteers from PTB Environmental, PTB Business Development, PTB Finance, PTB, Engineering, Propeller Club groups, US Coast Guard, Tampa Bay Association of Environmental Professionals, local Environmental firms, local Engineering firms, County staff, Public Relations firms, etc. The two public KTBB sites included an even more diverse group of nurses, airline companies, local businesses, couples, families, etc.

Within a few weeks, we had 17 additional individual clean-up sites managed by members of the Port community. PTB’s Environmental Director reached out to the contact person for each group, enlisted them as the site captain, challenged them to recruit a team, and provided them with some basic logistical information. Site captains connected with smaller groups and individual volunteers based on their abilities and Port security credentials. Each captain received a follow up email with detailed instructions and a map of each meeting site.  
PTB’s Environmental Director visited each site again in early April to determine safe access points and meeting locations for each group. A majority of the targeted debris was located within the heavily vegetated high tide line of the marshes and mangroves in and around the Port. Some sites were overgrown with vegetation, which could have made volunteer access to the debris challenging. The director cleared several access points for volunteers to safely access the accumulated debris and marked the access locations with flagging tape. A follow up phone call was made to each site captain to describe each individual sites logistics and to verify the ability of the volunteer teams. A site visit was completed with several site captains at the more challenging sites to review meeting points, safe access points, and other site logistics.

As previously mentioned, the site registration, volunteer liability waivers, and material pick up were organized through the existing KTBB program. The individual site registration link and scheduling of materials pick up was handled through KTBB staff. Each site captain registered their individual teams and scheduled the pick-up of needed material such as gloves, trash bags, trash pickers, liability waivers, and promotional items.

On Earth Day, Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 8am the inaugural Great Port Clean-up kicked off with hundreds of enthusiastic volunteers gathering at 19 sites in and around the Port. Port Authority staff, including Port President & CEO Paul Anderson, three of seven Port Commissioners and dozens of Port staff participated in the clean-up. It was a beautiful day and fortunately, a low tide allowed volunteers to access the high tide line without getting too wet. The clean-up event lasted for two hours, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and included a diverse group of volunteers from the Port Authority, Port community, and the public.   
The results were astounding, before and after pictures of these areas where over 50 years of debris accumulation was removed are significant. By the end of the event, over 19,000 pounds (9.6 tons) of trash and debris were removed from our local waters and surrounding lands. We consider the event to have been a great success. With the enthusiasm of the volunteers and the dedication of the Port, this will surely be an annual event for the Port and continue to grow in the future.

**Award Criteria**   
There are six general award criteria used to evaluate the entries in the competition. The project application should attempt to address these criteria explicitly:

1. **The level and nature of benefits to environmental quality, beautification or community involvement;**

This event resulted in a significant benefit to the environmental quality of our local waters. The removal of over 19,000 pounds (9.6 tons) of debris and trash from entering or re-entering our waterways is significant. The trash accumulated around the water’s edge could surely re-enter the waters during a storm or wind event. Tampa Bay, an estuary of national significance, is a natural treasure in our community. The removal of this amount of debris helps to maintain the Bay’s natural functions, protects fish and wildlife, and beautifies our community. The amount of community involvement in our inaugural event was inspiring. The Port community embraced the idea and we recruited volunteers from the business community, government agencies, civic groups, and the public. Even though we purposefully kept the inaugural event “small”, we had over 300 volunteers. The number of volunteers and the amount of trash and debris removed will certainly grow for next year’s event.

1. **The level of independent involvement and effort by the port;**

The concept of the event and a majority of the planning was done by Port Authority staff, specifically the Director of Environmental Affairs and Director of Communications. However, this was planned as a Port community event, so port staff partnered with the Propeller Club of Tampa and Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful. Several Port Authority employees served as site captains on individual sites and recruited a diverse group of other Port Authority employees, friends, and colleagues to participate.

1. **The creativity of the solution or programs;**

This event builds on our existing Trash Free Water program. The hands on approach of Port staff and the strategic selection of targeted clean-up sites made this clean-up event unique. Many people from the public assume that most of this trash is coming from the Port or the cruise ships. The event was a creative way to do our part and to help educate that public on marine debris and help them understand that a majority of trash found in and around Tampa Bay originated from outside of our port community.

1. **Whether the project or program results are apparent (the project must be complete through some beneficial increment);**

The results of the event are apparent. The recruitment of 342 volunteers, during a pandemic, and the removal of over 19,000 pounds (9.6 tons) or debris is significant. The event will be an annual event for Port Tampa Bay and will continue to grow.

1. **The cost effectiveness of the activity or the program; and**

The event was very cost effective. Port Tampa Bay has a $8,000 contracted work order with Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful to help facilitate the Great Port Clean-up. However, sponsorships from the Port community to help pay for the materials and custom event T-shirts topped $30,000, which surely covered the cost of the event and will help support Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful continued good work in our community. Volunteer labor donated by the Port community and public reduced the cost to only materials. The City of Tampa disposed of the collected trash at no cost to the event.

1. **The transferability of the technology or idea to the port industry.**

The Great Port Clean-up could easily be an annual event at every Port. The idea is transferable and most Ports have a Keep America Beautiful affiliate in their community, many Ports are likely working with them now. We are already having discussions with other Florida Port communities to collaborate on a State Wide Great Port Clean-up event next year. The AAPA could collaborate with Keep America Beautiful in the future to have a nationwide annual Great Port Clean-up event.